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MŰHELYTANULMÁNYOK  
A ROMÁNIAI KISEBBSÉGEKRŐL

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MARJOKE OOSTEROM

## RAISING YOUR VOICE

Interaction Processes Between Roma  
and Local Authorities in Rural Romania



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# RAISING YOUR VOICE

## Interaction Processes Between Roma and Local Authorities in Rural Romania

### Introduction

■ After the fall of communism, international awareness of the situation of national and ethnic minorities in Eastern Europe increased. This is especially true for the Roma, because their marginal situation quickly worsened in the transition period (Ringold et alii 2004: 4). The Roma form the largest minority in Europe, of which most live in the former communist countries. The situation of a large part of the Roma is one of social exclusion. They fall behind in practically all sectors of society, their living standards are marginal and they have few opportunities and resources to improve this situation. Often their access to public services like health care or social assistance is limited. Of all countries in the Central and Eastern European region, the Roma minority in Romania is the largest in size and also the most diverse. Estimations go as far as 3 million, but their probable figure is estimated to be 1.5 million (Barany 2002b: 160).

Before Romania joined the European Union (in 2007) a list of criteria was laid down in the Accession Partnership, in which priorities are stipulated that need government action (EC, 2005). Integration of the Roma is one of these priorities, which is supported by EU's funding instrument, PHARE. The designing of a nation-wide "strategy" to improve the situation of the Roma already took off in 1998 and was adopted by the parliament in 2001. Although a range of institutional measures has been taken at the national level, a multitude of problems to implement the strategy exists at the local level. In most Roma projects, the local authorities become an important partner. To receive a grant from the PHARE instrument for example, the participation of both the local authorities and the Roma is required. Authorities and Roma communities thus have to cooperate, while their relationship usually is one of mistrust, both parties being suspicious of each other's moves.

On the side of the local authorities, prevailing prejudice as written above does not form the only problem. To address Roma poverty means to address a very complex situation, in which social, economical and historical factors play a role (Ringold et alii 2004: 9). Even in the case of good will it is very difficult to make any improvements. Local authorities often lack the capacity and budget to improve the conditions of the Roma in their settlement. Especially in rural areas, the authorities hardly have revenues to finance facilities in the Roma communities. The Roma themselves do not believe that the authorities will do anything to improve their situation. They have to deal with local officials on many occasions, especially for services provided by the state. In many studies, Roma have reported to be treated badly and rudely, or they were not assisted at all. Another problem on the side of the Roma communities is that they are characterised by a very low level of social cohesion. They seem to be more vertically than horizontally organised and hardly unite to strive for their common interests (Barany 2002a: 290). This research therefore focuses on the relationship between the Roma and the local authorities in rural villages. It will examine the social and political processes that shape the interaction between them, and how interaction around certain issues takes place.

### Research objectives

Roma have faced social exclusion for centuries and that this is an enduring situation. Social exclusion is both a condition and a process. It refers to a certain position in society that can be linked with (material) living conditions, but at the same time it refers to relationships with others. The central point is the



inability to participate in all fields of society. The term implicitly refers to a certain passive state: Roma are excluded by *others*. Reality is much more complex though. In some cases, some Roma tend to self-marginalisation. The local situation is a complex one and many factors play a role. From literature and NGO reports, it has become clear that a tense relationship between the authorities and the Roma can be a barrier to overcome social exclusion. In other cases, institutional measures exist that fail to include the Roma. I want to examine to what extent social exclusion can be explained by the relationship between the Roma and the local authorities. I am aware that this will be a partial explanation of the situation, but it will unravel a part of the complexity. A first objective of this research can therefore be formulated as follows: with this study I aim to make a contribution to the knowledge about social exclusion of the Roma, by describing social processes and explaining how social and political processes shape the relationship between the Roma and local authorities.

Theoretically, this research fits within a sizeable body of research that concentrates on the relationship between state institutions and civil society. Strongly related to this issue is the function of social capital and civic associations in democratisation processes. Interaction between formal, state institutions and informal, civil society institutions is thus an important theme for this research. A second objective of this research can be formulated as follows: with this study I aim to make a contribution to the knowledge on the interaction between formal and informal institutions.

### **Methodology**

Research was carried out from the beginning of May until mid-October 2005. This period of research was divided into three stages. The first phase, orientation, I used to gather information on the situation of the Roma in Romania in general and their relationship with local authorities in particular. In the second phase I selected two villages for the case studies. I also chose the critical issues around which I would examine social and political processes. During the third phase, which was the longest, I carried out fieldwork in the villages.

#### ***Participant observation***

Fieldwork in Nemşa and Ogra was the crucial part of the research. Marian Goga, member of Roma Student organisation Romano Suno, joined me to both villages for four days at the start of my stay there. This proved to be the best way to find an entrance in the Roma neighbourhoods; he knew to whom we should speak and how and, being a Roma himself, the Roma trusted me and let me stay. In both villages I stayed with Roma families for over a month. I was able to participate in the households and daily tasks of the family. These houses were in the Roma neighbourhoods, from where I visited other families. To participate in these neighbourhoods proved to be of enormous value, because it gave me the opportunity to understand the complexity of social relations, differences in status between families and problems in their daily lives.

#### ***Survey***

It was important to compare the villages systematically on the level of social exclusion of the Roma populations. Therefore, I did a survey on different aspects of social exclusion. I included questions on the accumulated household income, housing and the level of education of each member of the household. I then continued with questions about the functioning of the local authorities, the attitudes of officials, and their satisfaction with specific governmental activities. In both villages 34 respondents were selected by random sampling. In Ogra, many of the Roma could not read the questionnaires themselves. In that case I, or Marian Goga read the questions and answers and marked the answer they had selected. It needs to be said that the original plan was to have adult respondents only. However, some of the Roma in Ogra are under the age of 18, while having children and a house of their own. In one case, a fifteen year old father and a sixteen year old mother lived with their baby in a small clay house they had just finished building. For this reason, households with under age parents were not excluded from the survey.

#### ***Open Interviews***

To gather information about the history, social networks, and structure in the village, I carried out 7 open interviews with Roma in each village. In these interviews I also discussed their relationship with the local authorities and which issues were critical. I selected these respondents after I had visited all families of the Roma communities, taking into account who was able to explain carefully and slowly.

To find out about interaction with the Romanian and ethnic Hungarian population and their opinion about the Roma in the villages, I visited three Romanian and Hungarian families in each village. With them I discussed what kind of contacts they have with the Roma and how they look upon their poverty situation.

#### **PRA-exercises and semi-structured interviews**

Although the initial plan was to do various PRA-techniques (as described in Thomas et alii 1998), these were not suitable in all situations. People were often busy, they did not want to stay in one place, and it was quite difficult to gather them together in the first place. Useful PRAs were a mapping exercise of the village and a ranking of problems in Nemşa. In Ogra, a problem tree and a ranking on their problems were useful exercises. As one of the aims of PRA-techniques is to raise discussions, I tried to find other ways to gather information through discussions. In many occasions, I found groups of people gathered together, like neighbours visiting my host families in the evening or people sitting outside on Sundays. I then provoked discussions on local politics by asking a few questions.

#### **Interviews**

In each village I carried 5 interviews with members of the local authorities. These were in both cases the mayor, the vice mayor, 2 councillors and staff that do the bookkeeping and keep files on social assistance. First, I focused on their opinions and expectations of the Roma in the village. Second, I concentrated on the issues that raised problems in the interaction. In Ogra I looked through the minutes of council meetings and the local budget to verify whether the claims of local officials that they often speak about Roma issues, but that did not have the funds to take action, were true. In the case of Ogra, I interviewed the councillor to the Prefect of the County Office for Roma in Târgu Mureş.

#### **The structure of the paper**

The structure of this paper is as follows: the next section discusses the relevant theories and concepts for this study. Starting from the work of Robert Putnam elaborates on social capital, civil society, and institutions. In section 3 I describe the empirical phases of this research. I carried out two case studies in the villages Nemşa and Ogra in order to compare two situations of interaction between the authorities and Roma. First I discuss the history and conditions of the Roma in Nemşa, followed by a description of their community structure and their relationship with the local authorities than I describe the situation in Ogra. Hence, research questions will be answered for both villages. In the last part, I will summarise the comparison between the two villages and present my conclusions.

## **Linking social to the political**

■ The relation between state and society is an issue for extensive research. It is a complex issue, within which a wide range of phenomena can be studied. Since Robert Putnam's *Making Democracies Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993), the concepts of civil society and social capital became heavily debated. His comparative study of institutional performance in different regions in Italy provoked strong reactions on how a well-functioning 'civic community' in the form of social capital could lead to responsive and effective government. Putnam extended the effect of a well-functioning civic community on government performance to economic growth and prosperity. While we still do not know the exact meaning and functioning of the concept, social capital is widely used in development policies. Central theme of this research is the interaction between state institutions and the Roma as an ethnic minority. Therefore, the focus will be on the relation between social capital and political processes and governance, but the relation to economic development will be concisely discussed. Starting from Putnam's work, this section presents a brief overview of the debate on social capital and of its relation to governance in particular. It will then continue to a subsection on institutions and social exclusion. Finally, I want to present a line of arguments that pledge for a focus on social process and interface interactions. This approach may serve to overcome weaknesses in social capital theory.



## Perspectives on Social Capital

Putnam stated that a high level of social capital and a strong civic community would lead to economic development and institutional performance, thus meaning democratisation. His conclusions raised a lengthy debate on the forms and functions of social capital, making social capital a popular theme throughout the 1990s. Scientists and policy makers from various fields came to study the sources, functions, and effects of social capital. Still, theories are inadequate (Schuurman 2003: 992). Let us concentrate more deeply on social capital as a concept; its various definitions, forms and related effects, and its analytical value.

Pierre Bourdieu is usually mentioned as the first author giving a theoretical account of social capital. Bourdieu wants to explain how power and oppression are created and reproduced, and how these capitals attach to individuals as well as to socioeconomic groups (Fine 1999: 6). He was especially interested in the reproduction and consolidation of advantages by elite groups. He distinguished different forms of capital: social capital, human capital, cultural capital and financial capital (Bourdieu 1986).

James Coleman defines social capital as “a variety of different entities [which] all consist of some aspects to social structure, and [which] facilitate certain actions of actors - whether personal or corporate actors - within the structure” (Coleman cited in Grootaert-Van Bastelaer 2002: 2). He wants to demonstrate how individual attainment is influenced by family or other aspects of the micro-social environment, which is interpreted as the possession of social capital (Fine 1999: 5). To Coleman, social capital is mostly functional; it is composed of sets of social relationships and arrangements that enable individuals to achieve their goals. He describes social capital as the component of human capital that allows members of a given society to trust one another and to cooperate in forming new groups and associations (Coleman 1988). According to Coleman, the difference between human and social capital is that human capital consists of individual skills and characteristics, whereas social capital lies in the relations between individuals and groups and not in the individuals themselves (Edwards-Foley 1998: 128). Important is both Coleman’s and Bourdieu’s emphasis on social capital as *resource*. An individual has access to this resource and can use it to achieve personal goals.

Deepa Narayan relates social capital to both the individual and the collective level. In the World Bank study, *Voices of the poor*, social capital is broadly defined as “(...) norms and networks that enable people to coordinate collective action” (Narayan 2000: 129). This coordinating capacity may vary, but any group, network and organisation “owns” social capital. When speaking about individuals, it refers to the extent and nature of social networks such as kinship networks, neighbours and associations (*ibidem*: 49). According to Narayan, social capital can manifest itself in norms, values and informal networks, as well as in local organisations like informal lending associations and farmer cooperatives (*ibidem*: 130). This links social capital to its organisational form, civil society. Social capital is seen as an *asset*, which is, together with physical capital, human capital, and environmental assets, important for the way people sustain their livelihoods. It is on this point that social capital is seen as conducive to economic development.

Apart from the different definitions of social capital, authors distinguish different *forms* of social capital. Authors like Narayan, Portes and Landolt, Schuurman, and Varshney all draw attention to the analytical distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. *Bonding social capital* refers to the norm and networks of relationships *within* a group, while on the other hand *bridging social capital* refers to the *external* links, to networks and relationships that cross the borders of certain groups. This distinction is important when we study different groups in society, especially in relation to the distribution of power and resources.

Schuurman indicates that if social capital is going to be used in the analysis of multicultural societies, one ought to distinguish between bonding and bridging social capital (Schuurman 2003: 1002). Following Portes and Landolt, people can be excluded by others through social capital. Even if social capital is horizontally organised, it may have negative consequences, because people can keep resources within their own social group and exclude others from access. This shows lacunae in Putnam’s study. He assumed that different groups (associations) would cooperate and would require adequate governance. However, when different groups lack bridging social institutions, they will not be able to cooperate. Also, if different groups pursue different goals, they may not even be willing to cooperate, regardless of the presence of bridging social institutions. If one group has more power and is more in control of resources, it is “vertically positioned” to other groups, no matter if each of these groups has horizontally structured bonding social capital (Narayan 1999: 1). The absence of bridging social capital can work twofold; in the first place it may indeed cause the exclusion of groups of people from resources by other groups; in the second place it may hamper the cooperation of groups that have similar goals.

### Three categories of criticism

We have seen a number of definitions, descriptions, and components of social capital. This section elaborates on three categories of criticisms; the analytical value of the concept, its status as independent variable, and its function in democratic economic processes. To start with the conceptual value, from what is written we may derive that the exact meaning of the concept social capital remains ambiguous. Ben Fine criticises the literature on social capital, saying that nobody actually knows what it is and what it can do (Fine 1999, 2001, 2003). His attack is especially directed towards the World Bank, whose researchers claim that social capital can be applied in numerous fields (Fine 2001: 137). Also Edwards and Foley state that Putnam's view on social capital is limited. Putnam focuses on associational membership and norms of reciprocity and trust. He then limits his focus to the 'good' that social capital can produce; civic engagement. They further argue that the socio-economic and political context substantially influence the kind and degree of a specific form of capital (Edwards–Foley 1998: 129). It cannot be reduced to individual possession. Edwards and Foley propose a more structural view on social capital and civil society, and awareness of the different contexts. Furthermore, Edwards and Foley criticise Putnam for giving social capital a normative dimension, which harms the analytical value of the concept, a point that is expressed by Ben Fine as well. Social capital is generally associated with something positive.

Secondly, Frans Schuurman questions the belief in social capital as an independent variable. If economic growth produces a wealthier population of which members own more human capital, then it is very likely that this leads to the creation of more associations and participation in networks. Thus, Schuurman suggests that social capital can be the dependent variable, as for instance a low degree of social capital can be caused by poverty and economic development can create an active civil society. He warns for a tendency towards blaming the victim (Schuurman 2003: 999). Social capital is seen as something that people create themselves and if they perform well they create development. In other words: "(...) if you are marginalised, poor and underdeveloped it is basically your own fault" (*ibidem*: 1000). Schuurman then shifts to a global analysis of social capital and indicates that there is a growing distance between the 'social' and the 'political' (*ibidem*: 1005). One instance is the observed trend towards decentralisation without knowing how to connect the local government with local people. Research on social capital could contribute to knowledge on how to reconnect the social with the political (*ibidem*: 1008).

Thirdly, an extensive set of criticisms is directed at the functions of social capital; both its function in promoting good governance and in assuring economic growth. To Margaret Levi the mechanism through which good government is produced is not clear at all. According to Putnam citizens who have dense networks of civic engagement not only trust each other, but also *produce* good, democratic government (Levi 1996: 48). Whether social capital produces economic development is equally much debated. We already discussed a possible negative effect of social capital, namely when social capital is used to prevent others from access to resources. Power inequalities and social conflict rarely come to the forefront in the social capital debate (Fine 1999: 9).

Democracy theorists also state that structural influences are ignored. They propose to use social capital as a dependent variable and put the emphasis on the influences of political institutions. This set of criticism fits within the theoretical debate on the relation between actors and structure. Sidney Tarrow concludes in a book review of *Making Democracies Work* that indicators of malaise may be civic, but the causes can be structural (Tarrow 1996: 396). Margaret Levi argues that Putnam overlooks how the government institutions and politics can shape, influence and delimit people's choices and behaviour. The government both reflects and shapes, a possibility Putnam recognises several times, but he does not analyse how the government institutions may have influenced or determined the organisation of the local community (Levi 1993: 378). She argues for a more complete and complex model that incorporates the creation and maintenance of social trust, among individuals as well as in government functioning.

### Trust networks and governance

In his recently published book, Charles Tilly offers a new perspective on the relation between trust and democracy. As many other authors, he objects to the causal relation between trust and democratic governance; Putnam's *mechanism*. Tilly indicates two misconceptions in Putnam's theoretical argument. In the first place, Putnam considers the more effective institutions to be the more democratic. Secondly, he treats organisational networks, social capital, norms of reciprocity, and sources of trust as





inextricable concepts (Tilly 2005: 132). In later work about the United States, Putnam argues that high levels of engagement limit the inclination to cheat, thus strengthening *our better selves* and improving the performance of institutions (*ibidem*: 133). Tilly acknowledges that trust plays an important role in democracies. He relates the concept of trust to the concept of risk. A person trusts another person if he puts a possible outcome at risk by relying on the abilities, and possible failures, of the other person. It is thus a relationship in which at least one actor places valued concerns at risk to another actor. Such relations usually concentrate, or cluster, in networks. In his words, *trust networks* consist of: "[R] amified interpersonal connections, consisting mainly of strong ties, within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources and enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures of others." (*ibidem*: 12)

Tilly distinguishes three processes, which integrate trust networks into public politics: dissolution of segregated trust networks, integration of previously segregated networks, and new creation of politically connected trust networks (Tilly 2005: 136). These processes are conditions for democratisation, because then citizens become motivated to deal with possible downsides of democratic politics, instead of turning their backs in times of trouble. Although the integration of trust networks matters, as a sole condition it is not sufficient for democratisation. Tilly points out two other processes. In his opinion, democracy is characterised by broad, equal, binding, and protective relations between the state and the citizenry. Relations between trust networks and public politics matter, and the connection will only work with contingent consent on the part of the members of trust networks (*ibidem*: 135). The concept of trust is used in this research to study the cohesiveness of the Roma community in the village and its relation with the local authorities. Following Levi and Tilly, political trust is distinguished from social trust, and the concept is related to risk. Social trust is defined as trust among individuals and groups, and it is indicated by the expectation that others will help you if you help them. Political trust is defined as the trust that individuals or groups put in state institutions and officials, which is indicated by the extent to which respondents think that the authorities will support them in case of personal problems, and the extent to which they think that the authorities will address problems in the village.

### The Interface Perspective

Although formal institutions are laid down in rules, laws, or formalised bodies, in reality, social processes may exist that alter the official function of these institutions. Stated differently, formal and informal institutions may interact in such a way, that the results are different from the anticipated outcomes. Narayan mentions the possible discrepancies between the formal and informal institutions. Examples are bribery or the Indian caste system; they can be officially prohibited but informally still be in use (Narayan 2000: 84).

An analytical approach that can be very useful to study this problem is the *interface perspective*. The interface approach concentrates on the critical junctures where actors from different backgrounds meet and interact. It focuses on linkages and networks that develop between individuals and parties. It is thus an actor-oriented approach. Over time, continued interaction creates certain expectations and standardised patterns of interaction. Interaction is a social process, in which information or ideas about certain issues are communicated. An advantage of this approach is that it leaves room for the complexity of social processes and power. Focusing on points where different opinions are confronted and social differences come to the surface, it must place these situations in a wider institutional setting that influences the interaction (Long 1999: 1). Central elements of the interface perspective are power, knowledge, and discursive process.

For this research I want to combine this interface approach with Appendini and Nuijten's institutional framework approach that does not limit institutions to fixed dichotomies (Appendini–Nuijten 2002). Studying Roma, their networks, and their interaction with the local authorities from an interface perspective serves to introduce the factor power into the analysis, a factor that was missing in social capital studies. Discourses are an important element of interface analysis, which help to understand issues on which the authorities and Roma disagree. This can provide insights on where informal and formal institutions do not connect. Methodologically, the interface perspective examines *critical events* such as interventions and the processes and discourses involved. The interaction between Roma and local authorities is studied according to this method, though 'critical events' have been modified to *critical issues*. These are issues involving both Roma and the local authorities, which are sensitive for disagreement and tension.

## Roma in Nemşa. A village with Saxon inheritance

■ The small, scenic village, Nemşa is situated in a rural area of Sibiu county. The village is situated in a region where the Saxons formed a large minority in the past. Saxons massively re-migrated back to Germany after 1989, but indicators of their presence were still clearly visible, especially in architecture. The closest town to Nemşa is Mediaş, twenty kilometres to the north, which used to be Transylvania's centre of industrial production during communist times.

As small as Nemşa is, it does have a centre marked by the tower of the Saxon church.<sup>1</sup> The two shops, the cultural hall (*cămin cultural*), a bar and a public phone are all situated around an open space right in the middle of the village, there where the asphalt road from Mediaş continues in the sandy Main Street (*Strada Principală*). A small stream divides the main street, and the village as a whole, into two parts. The people told that, in the recent past, a Roma quarter called *ţigănie* was located in two side streets from the centre.

The local government is thus seated in Moşna and from here it administrates the approximately 3300 inhabitants of which 1500 live in Moşna itself, 770 in Nemşa and 630 in a second *sat*: Alma Vii. Nemşa is connected to Mediaş by only two busses, one leaving at 7 a.m. and the other one at 5 p.m. Altogether, this makes Nemşa quite an isolated village.

The population figure of the *comuna* Moşna was 3251, according to the 2002 national census. Romanians and Roma are the largest ethnic groups; they make up for respectively 64.31% and 30.05%. Of these 3251, approximately 770 people live in Nemşa. After 1990, most of the Saxons left to Germany and abandoned their houses. With their leaving, the Roma became one of the two important ethnic groups in Nemşa. Although the census shows that the Romanians are the majority in the *comuna*, the mayor and many of Nemşa's villagers (both Romanian and Roma) told me that the Roma are actually the majority in Nemşa. Many declared themselves to be Romanian in the 2002 census. According to the mayor, approximately 70% of Nemşa's population is Roma.<sup>2</sup>

The *comuna* was thus situated in the former Saxon region of Romania. In the *comuna* Moşna, the Saxons were a majority until the fall of communism. After the Saxons had left, their houses became property of the local government, which started to rent these houses against very low costs. The larger Roma families in Nemşa were offered Saxons houses for a very low rent. Many of them took this opportunity and moved from small dwellings to the large and strong Saxon houses with several rooms. Thus, while Strada Brazilor and Venchă were still called *ţigănie*, several Roma families now lived in the main street and a few other streets that used to be occupied by Saxons. For the Roma in Nemşa, especially the older ones, the history of the village had only two features: the Saxon presence and the flourishing agriculture during communist times. It was because of the Saxons that the Roma once settled in Nemşa. Some people remembered what was told about the Roma coming to Nemşa.

The Saxons brought the *ţigani* here to work for them in their houses and on their land. Other *ţigani* moved to Nemşa later to work for them too. The *sat* used to be on another side of the hills. It was because of the threat of the Turkish that the *sat* moved between these hills, for protection. The Saxons and only a few Romanian families owned all land, the *ţigani* did not have their own land. The *ţigani* first lived in the Saxon courtyards and barns they were servants (*slugă*). After the second World War, the *ţigani* received a piece of land. Some of the Saxon barns were broken down and with those bricks some of the *ţigani* families could build a home. Roma children from twelve to fifteen years old lived in the Saxon houses to serve. (Roma man, 56)

My parents came from a different *sat* to live here in Nemşa. They first lived in the court yard of a Saxon family. Later they received a piece of land from the Saxons and they built a house of bricks up in Strada Brazilor, where now lives the oldest sister of L. with her husband. My parents built it in 1954. Many Roma families used to live in small houses of wood and mud. (Roma man, 68)

1 The fortified church in Moşna is clear indicator of the former Saxon presence and a smaller church can be found in Nemşa. At the moment, it is restored with funds from the World Bank Cultural Heritage Project.

2 Interview with mayor R., on 6<sup>th</sup> of August 2005.



The Saxons brought the Roma to work as servants from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. For centuries the Roma had lived in the Saxon courtyards and barns. A few houses of mud and wood for the largest families were built on the edge of the village. Only some of the older Roma remembered that their families did not just 'receive' a piece of land after World War II, but that this was due to the land reforms in 1948. Some of the Saxons allowed the Roma families to take down their barns and with these bricks they could build a small house. Many of the Roma families gave their land back to the previous owners as they did not exactly know how to cultivate it and they hired themselves out as seasonal labour to the Saxon and Romanian families. The Saxons had their own customs and traditions and the villagers spoke about them with distinction. In the following section we will see that some of the Saxon customs were still in use. When asking about the Saxons, everyone would start with: „Sași erau harnici și gospodari!”, meaning that the Saxons were hardworking and knew how to organise their households. The Roma are convinced that they took over this quality from the Saxons: “They were an example. They taught us how to work! The Saxons worked with their head, the țigani with their hands. We learnt many things from them.” (Roma woman, 53)

From them we learnt to say; “fără muncă, nu se poate” [without work, you can't do anything] and “dacă nu muncești, nu ai” [if you don't work, you don't have]. That is what they said. The țigani learnt from the Saxons to have a schedule, that it is important to send your children to school, to work on the land, because they lived so long time in the Saxon families. (Roma man, 62)

In 1953, the now communist state took all land from the people and the first collectives were formed: *Cooperativa Agricolă de Producție* (CAP). For the villagers, agriculture was the heart and soul of village in the communist period. The majority worked on the CAPs, but many of the men were working in the factories in Mediaș. The fields around Nemșa were grazing lands and used for large scale production of corn and potatoes. Near the village was a large vegetable garden, where the elderly worked. On the hills were numerous wine yards. *Mama Vinului*, the villagers called their hills: mother of wine. The villagers told that people from all over the country came to work here and how famous their wine was. Along the road to the other *sat* Alma Vii used to be some communist flats that hosted seasonal workers. Villagers could have a small garden and some animals of their own, but they had to deliver some of its produce every month. Many adult men worked in the industry in Mediaș. Proudly they told how transport for the factory workers was organised; busses were running for every shift till late in the evening, always crowded with people. For work in the factories the people received copybooks with vouchers and some money.

The work on the CAP was organised in teams (*echipă*) and very strictly administered. Two *brigades* existed, one for each half of the grounds around the villages. Each brigade was composed of three teams. Two Saxons teams, one Romanian team, two Roma teams and one mixed team worked their own marked piece of land side by side. Each team had its own chief. For the Roma, it meant that they were *working with* other people, instead of *working for* other people and this something they frequently recall: “Atunci oameni erau egali; nu care are, are și care nu are, nu are. Români și țigani nu sunt diferiți de loc, sunt uniți”. [Then people were equal; not who has, has and who doesn't have, doesn't have. Romanians and țigani are not different at all, they are united.]

Everybody was working hard. The Saxons just as hard as the Romanians and the Roma. And everybody was speaking well with each other and it was good. In the end of the month, we received agriculture products from the fields. In the autumn sometimes also some money. What we received, was not enough for the families. Everyone was stealing from the CAPs! (Roma woman, 56)

Except for the mixed team, all other five were composed of separate ethnic groups. I asked for an explanation. People answered that it was not organised like this because people did not want to work with people from a different ethnicity. The communist leaders first appointed chiefs of the teams, who were Saxon, Romanian and also Roma. The chiefs then chose their own people, their relatives, people they got along with and those who spoke the same language. One man told how the teams were motivated to work hard, because the communists organised competition and rewards:

On the offices of the CAP in the main street, a newspaper was published every month. It was called *gazeta*. You could read exactly; team number ... five worked ... so much lands and products. When you read this, you wanted to work more with your team! (Roma man, 62)

Village meetings, *ședință*, were frequently organised in the *cămin cultural*, in which the communist authorities announced work schedules and *norme*; certain amounts of the agricultural products directed from a higher political level. Each month, the people had to make these amounts in order to receive their goods and vouchers. The chiefs controlled the working lists and submitted lists of produce to higher officers. If someone refused to work, the police would come to his home for inspection. People could purchase products only in limited portions with the vouchers they received. The people told me that "everything was based on contract", meaning that the amounts of product they could receive was fixed and depended on the size of the household. Amounts were small; family with five children sometimes received only one bread and two liters of milk. Governance was, of course, top-down. Orders from the state were directed to regional authorities in Sibiu, which were directed to the Communist Party in Moșna and from there to the communist, collective offices in Nemșa. Officials were Romanian, in line with the nationalistic policies. According to older Romanians and Roma in Nemșa, the Saxons refrained from politics, because they feared the Communist Party.

Generally speaking Nemșa is a village with a particular history, which affected the present living conditions of the Roma. The former presence of the Saxons influenced the assets of Roma families. With the leaving of the Saxons after 1990, Nemșa's land reserves suddenly expanded. Due to interaction between the local authorities and the village population, this opportunity was used to distribute land to the Roma. After 1989, the Roma lost stable incomes from the collectives and factories, but to some extent this loss was compensated by the land they received. Also, the abandoned Saxon houses were offered to them against low costs. In both cases, large families had priority, in order to improve their situation.

Focussing on the assets of the Roma, it was clear that their living conditions were poorer than the conditions of Romanians. This was especially true for their employment situation. Roma had fewer opportunities to find work in the city, as they are not as mobile as Romanians and they did not have acquaintances in leading positions. The isolated location of the village is thus a factor that influences the situation of the Roma. All Roma children participated in school and, thanks to the efforts of the local authorities, transport to Moșna was organised to take pupils to grades 9 and 10. This situation at least enhanced their opportunities to find work. None of the Roma could afford to send their children to higher education in Mediaș, in contrast to Romanian families. Romanians had more assets, which enabled them to move further. This was also the case for access to health care. If a Romanian needed medical care, it was easier for him to get it in the city.

However, although the situation of the Roma was not easy, especially for large households, none of the families worried about food or housing. The basics were there. Many Roma in Nemșa called themselves poor, but they were aware that the conditions of Roma in other villages were even worse. They frequently recalled that living in rural Romania is hard, but at least they had something of their own and they were able to sustain a family.

As the Roma in Nemșa did not speak Romani and no longer lived strictly separated from the non-Roma population, one had to listen carefully how they describe themselves as a distinct group. They referred to themselves as *țigani* and frequently emphasised their unity. Everyone was speaking about 'we, *țigani*.' As I. would say:

Roma is a word more political (pointing with is finger in the sky). Here (pointing at the floor) we are *țigani*. For us it is not a problem to say *țigani*, we have always been *țigani*. (Roma man, 44)

*Țigani* is a word that meant 'without place' in the past, because originally the *țigani* were travelling and did not have houses. It is not a bad word. (Roma woman, 25)

The people knew exactly who in Nemșa was Roma and who was not. Drawing the map of Nemșa in a PRA exercise, the participants gave different marks to Romanian and Roma houses. When visiting all families that were identified as Roma on the map, they indeed spoke about themselves as *țigani*. They were even proud to speak about themselves as such and all spoke about the Roma in Nemșa as



hard working and hospitable people. However, some of the Roma must have declared themselves as Romanians in the national census. Asking for reasons why some Roma had refused to declare their Roma identity, the people said that they might have been nervous to talk with officials or that they did not want to be confused with those Roma that behaved badly. Roma also defined their own identity by summing up differences with Romanians. In general, most Roma qualified their relationship with the Romanians in Nemşa as very good. "Here we don't have problems like Romanians and Roma have in other places", the people often said. The expressions used in Romanian are: "*se înţeleg bine între ei*" and "*vorbesc frumos*" (understand well among each other and speak nicely). All Roma agreed that the most important difference between Roma and Romanians was that the Romanians were wealthier. In the second place, some of the Roma told that Romanians were not as hospitable as the Roma. A poor Roma would always make food for you or let you join the family meal, unlike Romanians, who even had more resources. A third difference was that Romanians walked 'with their noses up', meaning that they looked down upon others. This was mentioned by only a few Roma, all young ones. The Roma said that they had felt more united with the Saxons, and that the distance between Roma and Romanians always was a little bigger. However, they said their relationship with Romanians improved after the Revolution. "We go to each other's festivities" – said M., one 62-year old Roma man. All Roma agreed that also Romanians were *harnici* and *gospodari*, just like the Roma. Another important difference mentioned, was that the Roma were *more united* than the Romanians. I., a 44 year old Roma, said about this matter:

The Romanians, they are a different category. Their families are more individual. When you walk through our streets, you see everybody sitting in front of the gate and talking. We work together, we do much together. Romanians are more in their own court yard.

All agreed that also between Romanians existed differences. In the last couple of years, a few Romanian families moved to Nemşa. These were very wealthy families and they bought large Saxon houses in the Main Street. The Roma did not know these *new Romanians* so well. They told that these Romanians did not greet the Roma, unlike the Romanians that belonged to Nemşa. Thus, Roma felt better about their relation with the *original Romanians*. In the following sections we will see that Roma and Romanians have their own networks, but a few cross-cutting networks do exist.

### Networks among Roma

Active networks of help and reciprocity existed among the Roma, while these networks between Roma and Romanians were much more formal. When I asked how people helped each other, everybody responded that they could not assist each other with money. The Romanian word for help, *ajutor*, means in the first place financial help. "Here we don't give money, we work", one woman answered. She remembered only one occasion when people collected money to donate. Once a barn with all crops for the winter burnt down. Then the Roma collected money to assist the family.

Especially among relatives, but also among neighbours and friends, the Roma helped each other with all kind of labour activities. These activities usually included working on each others' fields and building or repairing barns and houses. Another category of help was to use items or animals from others, which people did not have themselves. Examples were to use one's horse to fetch wood or crops, to use the neighbour's well or ovens to bake breads and the lending out of all kind of tools. Many people explicitly said that it was not common to lend each other money, because everybody needed all money they had for their own families. While help in the form of labour was supposed to be given back by physical work, practically anything could be given in return for using each other's tools. I once visited a Roma woman (R.), whose neighbour had improvised a sort of washing machine for his wife, L. At that moment, R. was washing clothes with L's machine, while L. was sitting on the bed, watching their children and eating a meal prepared by R. For celebrations like a wedding or a baptism, tens of people were involved in the preparations. All these people received the feast and meal in return and help from the host-family for the next celebration.

### Networks that cross the ethnic boundary

The villagers in Nemşa, both Roma and Romanians, were quite familiar with one another. This was due to the fact that the village was small, geographically isolated and poorly connected to the city by public transport. Besides, only few families migrated to Nemşa from elsewhere in the county.

Concentrating on the Roma population, one could see that practically all families were now connected through marriages. „Aici toți sunt rude” (all are relatives here), three Roma women agreed. A few mixed marriages between Roma and Romanians existed. In the evenings people gathered in the centre to talk, leaning against the wall of the *cămin cultural* while music sounds from the bar. As a Romanian villager said: “Everyone you see standing in front of the *cămin cultural* in the evening, is Roma”. And indeed; when after one month I recognised all people and knew to which families they belonged, I would only seldom see Romanians join a conversation. When I asked about this, the one Roma answered: “I do not exactly know. I think they have less time to go out in the evenings, because they have more land, more animals and bigger houses to take care of. They are very busy.” Relations of help like described in the previous section, were uncommon between Roma and Romanians. Only two Roma families said to have such a relationship with a Romanian family. It seemed that ‘help’ even had a different meaning to Romanians. From interviews with three Romanian families, it became clear that it usually involved a transaction of money. Roma went to Romanians to work on their land and received a wage in return. At the time, a Roma earned 25 RON for one day of work. If the person ate lunch served by the Romanians, he would earn 20 RON. In general, the Romanian families knew one or two Roma families in the village, of which they hired the men and sons for seasonal labour. In the winter, it happened that some Roma families did not have enough food. If they turned to another Roma family, they could receive some meat and return some back as soon as they could. If they turned to a Romanian family, the Romanians would write down their names and the amount they received. In the next summer, the Roma family would have to work a number of hours for the value of food they took in the winter. Only in the case of two Roma families it happened that Romanians went to work on land belonging to a Roma. One of the remaining Saxons was a close friend with one Roma family. He helped them to harvest potatoes and they would go with him the next week. Lending out tools and horses rarely occurred between Roma and Romanians. Usually, materials were passed on from a Romanian family to a Roma for second-hand price. This was what the Romanians perceive as ‘help’. In an interview with one of the Romanian families, the grandmother told that she helped a Roma family by employing the sons in the summer. When she had bought new furniture, she sold the old pieces to them for a cheaper price. “Așa i-am ajutat eu”, she said (that is how I helped them).

When it came to festivities, networks of help between Roma and Romanians did exist without financial transaction. Roma and Romanians participated in each others’ festivities like weddings, baptisms and the Christmas meals after December 26. In the case of celebrations, the Romanian families did help with activities like baking pies and cakes. They joined the meal, they ate, drank, sang and danced together with Roma. I was invited to a party for the Orthodox baptism of a Roma baby. After the ceremony in the church, the guests came together in the house of the family for a meal that would last from noon till late that night. Only women were allowed to sit at the tables and the men had to stand and watch from the entrance. Of the 25 guests, 4 were Romanian. It was one of the Romanian women who had made the special *prăjituri* [stuffed cakes]. The hostess would help her for her birthday party in return. The four women sat next to each other, laughing and singing and later on also dancing with the Roma women.

In interviews with Romanians, they emphasised, like the Roma themselves, that the Roma in Nemșa were *different from those in other places*. “We don’t have problems here” an older Romanian woman said, “We have a good relationship”. Also the Romanians said the biggest difference between them was that the Roma were poorer than Romanians. They acknowledged that it was difficult to find work, but some Romanians also thought that the Roma were less *gospodar*. As they were less *gospodar*, they did not know very well how to save and spend their money, and this would be the reason that they were not as wealthy. One Romanian woman told: “You see how they gather in the centre at night. They buy cigarettes and beers. We stay at home. We don’t go to drink, we make all beverages ourselves”. Showing her cellar, in which piles of vegetables were stored, she said:

Look, we save for the winter. They don’t save and for that reason they come to ask for food or some money in January. Then they have to work for us during summer. They should have worked to save in advance, not after!

Her son, a 36 year old man with a wife and two small children, had a different opinion. He thought the Roma were poorer, because most of them had less land and animals to make a living. He could imagine that the Roma longed back to communist times, when everyone earned the same. He, and





other Romanians in Nemşa, did not think of the communist period as *better times*. All Romanians said it was also heavy now, referring to the bad economic situation in Romania, but all think it was worse during communist times. They were not free and it was very difficult to get products.

### Informal self-organisation: *Vecinătate*

An interesting form of self-organisation, which was originally Saxon, was the *Vecinătate*. *Vecinătate* literally means 'neighbourhood' and Nemşa used to be divided in three of these neighbourhoods, which corresponded with the Saxon streets, the Romanian streets, and the Roma streets. Each *Vecinătate* thus formed a unit on village level and was led by the 'parents of the neighbourhood', *parinții Vecinătății*. Leadership over the *Vecinătate* rotated; every two years a new family was chosen to be Parents of the Neighbourhood. A *Vecinătate* had a cooperative function, but also facilitated the sharing of information. If the local authorities had to announce important information, this message was written on a small wooden board, which every *Vecinătate* passed from house to house. Each *Vecinătate* celebrated *Fosnic* with its own members in February. *Fosnic* was a two-day festivity to celebrate the end of the winter and the approaching spring, when everyone could take up their agricultural activities again.

With the leaving of the Saxons, only two *Vecinătate* remained. As the Roma and Romanians lived in separate streets, both groups had their own *Vecinătate*. The Roma who moved to the main (Romanian) street after 1990, did not want to leave their own *Vecinătate* and join the Romanian one. This resulted in the situation that a *Vecinătate* was no longer geographical unit, but a social unit, divided over ethnic lines. *Fosnic* was celebrated twice; one weekend by the Roma and one weekend by Romanians. The parents of the *Vecinătate* regulated the financial administration and distributed tasks among families. In addition, every family cooked or baked a part of the meal. Everybody brought his contribution to the *cămin cultural*. After the celebration, the parents of the *Vecinătate* counted how much money was left and people came together in the *cămin* to discuss what to do with the rest of the sum. Last year, the people decided to buy a few extra tables and benches for the *cămin*, so that everyone would have a place to sit next time.

In 2000, the couple D. and L. was Parents of the Roma *Vecinătate*. They decided to re-invent the custom of collecting money for funerals. This was a custom when the Saxons were still living in Nemşa, but it disappeared after 1990. D. and L. made a list of participating families and their addresses and thus created a 'Vecinătate for funerals'. If someone died, all members of this *Vecinătate* for funerals paid a sum of money. This helped the relatives of the deceased to cover the costs of the ceremony and a gravestone. D. visited each Roma family to discuss and ask whether they wanted to join. L. and one of her cousins, G., kept the lists and made sure everyone would pay. In 2002, the Roma chose a new family to be parents of the *Vecinătate*, but they did not want that this responsibility would shift to a different family too. Thus, it was decided that D., L. and G. remained responsible for this task. Membership to the *Vecinătate* for funerals was quite high. Of the respondents to the survey, 83.3% is a member. Those who were not members were mostly Pentecostals. The Pentecostal church had its own institution of collecting money for funerals. As in some families both members of the Orthodox and the Pentecostal church existed, it happened that the Orthodox persons were member of this *Vecinătate* and the others were not.

The church was traditionally an important institution to bring people together and maintain certain bonds. Two denominations existed in Nemşa: the Orthodox and Pentecostal church. All inhabitants belonged to one of these churches, but the Pentecostal church had approximately 30 members and all of them were Roma, while all other villagers belonged to the Orthodox Church and both Romanian and Roma were members. Of all survey respondents, 60% answered to be Orthodox and 40% Pentecostal. An important difference between the churches was the frequency of people going to the services. Orthodox services were held only on Sundays and holidays, while Pentecostals had meetings three times a week. While the Orthodox had a real church building, the Pentecostals came together in the home of a Roma family living in a large Saxon house. One of the rooms was furnished with chairs and one keyboard, which were all donated by a foreign church. Apart from these donations, the Pentecostals did not have contact with foreign churches. They did not exchange information, or other forms of assistance. The only form of cooperation was with seven other Pentecostal churches in the region, but this was limited to collecting money for funerals. As some households had both Orthodox and Pentecostal members, many families had contacts along both religious lines. Besides, all Pentecostals declared to have just as much contact with Orthodox neighbours as with fellow Pentecostals. Thus, the Roma population was not divided and a division between Orthodox and Pentecostals did not extend to other spheres of social relations.

### Cooperation in *Fraternitate*

The Roma NGO, *Centrul de Resurse pentru Comunitățile de Romi* (CRCR) from Cluj-Napoca created *Asociația Fraternitate* in 2002. It was an officially registered Community Based Organisation (CBO), which focused on the improvement of Roma conditions and interethnic relations. The executive committee of *Fraternitate* was composed of 7 Roma and 4 Romanians from Nemșa. This committee was formed after several meetings with a facilitator sent by CRCR. Everyone could join and approximately 30 people came to the first meeting. After several meetings, 11 people remained to form an executive committee. The facilitator explained in training sessions about involvement, how to write project proposals, how to organise projects and that it was important to collaborate with the local authorities. All ideas for projects were discussed. In the end, the committee decided to renovate the primary school. The school still had toilets in small cabins in the back of the garden, which was no longer allowed. The people were afraid that the School Inspectorate would close the school and that all children had to go to Moșna. As all families sent their children to school in Nemșa, this would be a good project for the whole community. They received US\$ 2000, which they used for materials. The physical work was done by the men, not only the committee members, but by other parents too. They also improved the principal's room and bought a computer for the school, which they as committee can use for meetings. The members of the committee and all other villagers were very proud on this project. On many occasions they told me how hard they worked, even after dinner and after they finished working on their own land.

An important element of the process was that Roma and Romanians discussed on an equal level and they had identified a project together. The Roma members were all men and the Romanians were women. Cooperation went well during meetings and for preparations, but when the physical work had to be done, the Roma and Romanians had different opinions. As it were the men who did the construction work, the Romanian women were less involved in this phase of the project. They did come to see how the men were working and gave comments on practical matters. Apparently, the men did not do the work exactly as they had agreed on in advance. This led to some quarrelling, but in the end everyone was happy with the achievements of the projects.

*Fraternitate* was recommended by CRCR to the Dutch NGO, Heifer Nederland. This NGO donated 48 goats to 15 Roma families in November 2004. In May 2005, the newborn goats had to be passed on to other Roma and Romanian families. In this way, the families were assisted in their livelihood and networks between Romanians and Roma should strengthen. This occasion was celebrated with a big feast to which many foreign and national NGOs were invited. Nemșa had become "the good case" and an example to other villagers. Heifer brought more goats in September 2005.

One of the purposes to form this association was to create a body of villagers that maintained dialogue with the local authorities. In the beginning, when they carried out the school project, collaboration with the local authorities sometimes went difficult. It was more a disagreement on a practical matter than a lack of will or involvement by one of the parties. The committee members and authorities had different opinions on the exact location of the toilets. Actually, the members did not want to collaborate with the authorities; at first they wanted to make it *their* project. Apart from the school project and the starting phase of the goat project, the committee and the local authorities do not collaborate on a structural basis. Nor is the committee active in promoting interests of the Roma or villagers in general. As we will see later, other institutions already existed to keep the link between the authorities and the *sat*.

When asking about persons that were important for the *sat*, the Roma often said that the CBO *Fraternitate* was important, instead of mentioning specific persons. The members of *Fraternitate* initiated good projects; the school was renovated and people had received goats. This is something the people were proud of and they explicitly said that this helped to sustain their families. Roma in Nemșa did not acknowledge one of them as a leader; someone they listened to or obeyed. They singled out a few persons who were 'doing good things for the *sat* and the *țigani*. These people were respected, but nobody would call them "leaders". They had in common that they were all active members of the Community Based Organisation *Fraternitate*. One was the man who was working in the shop, who kept the lists of the people that bought on credit. He was also the one who initiated the collection of money for funerals. Both tasks were considered important and helped the Roma in their daily life subsistence. Another person was the man who led the Pentecostal church. He was also the one who kept the lists of people who needed to pay for the keeping of the goats. People called him a wise man, somebody who could give advise. An expression often used was *om cumsecade* (a honest man). A third person mentioned was his brother. People told he was clever, but sometimes self-willed. He had studied the content of legal articles while he was in hospital for tuberculosis. With this knowledge, he always retorted to the





mayor and councillors in a village meeting. People acknowledged that he absolutely wanted the best for the *sat*, he just had a big mouth. It was him who once sent a letter to the regional authorities in Sibiu to ask why families in Nemşa did not receive the full 100% of the social allowance.

The Roma mentioned also three Romanian women. The first was Mrs. C., the local councillor. Although Mrs. C. was respected as a councillor, people did not see her as local leader. The villagers acknowledged her actions, but they saw her merely as someone fulfilling an official function. The same could be said about Mrs. Ch., who was the school director of Nemşa's primary school. Her status went along with her function and this was why the Roma identified her as important person. Last, the Roma mentioned Mrs. E. She ran a bakery in Nemşa and seven other shops in Mediaş, and she owned the local shop and the bar. She was one of the richest people in the village. The Roma called her *patrona*, as she employed several villagers. However, unlike the three Roma men, she was singled out for her economic status and not for her activity in the community. Both E. and Ch. were members of *Fraternitate*.

### Relation with the local authorities

This subsection discusses the relation between the Roma and the local authorities. To start with, we will have a look at the whole of attitudes toward each other; what do Roma think of different local government institutions and vice versa. In addition, what do both parties expect from each other. Also, we will pay some attention to the political trust that the Roma have in their authorities. Before I will start with the discussion of the Roma opinions on the authorities, let me first introduce the members of the local authorities. The governing body in Moşna consisted of the mayor, the vice-mayor and 13 councillors in the local council. The Social Democratic Party was the largest, followed by a second social democratic party. Another ten officials worked in the town hall, of which some often deal with the villagers. These are for example the bookkeeper, an engineer, and an official who was responsible for the social benefit.

The survey (N = 30) included a set of questions on the Roma's opinions about the performance of the local authorities. Questions on how the authorities were functioning, what they did for the people and the village, usually led to answers that described what the mayor did for them. The reason for this was that the mayor was the face of the local authorities; it accompanied his status, but he was also the one the villagers see most, apart from Nemşa's councillor. He visited Nemşa at least once a week, while the vice-mayor and councillors kept their occupations in Moşna. The Roma evaluated the performance of the mayor to be quite good. An overwhelming majority of the respondents considered him a good or even very good mayor. The vice-mayor, even though he was Roma, scored a little less than the mayor. The people made a few remarks about this. First of all, the vice-mayor owned one of the two shops in Nemşa, but in this one the people could not buy on credit. Another reason was that he was not as frequently seen in the village as the mayor. As he was active in keeping the relationship with the regional authorities and the regional Roma Party, he did not visit Nemşa often. Also the councillors received good scores, but this result needs a few remarks. To the villagers, face and voice of the local council was Mrs. C., the Romanian councillor from Nemşa. When the Roma answered the question about the councillors, actually all of them gave a score to Mrs. C. and only afterwards said something like: "Our councillor is very good, the others are more in Moşna's cube". Many of the people in Nemşa thought that the council was mainly interested in the village Moşna and not in the *sat* Nemşa.

Remarkably, the Roma evaluated the local authorities on different levels. The first level is a personal one and is about the kindness of the mayor and that he is willing to talk to anybody, illustrated by a quote from I.: „The mayor is a good man. I like him very much. Whether he is a good mayor? This is my answer; I think he is a good mayor 70%. This 70% is because he is a good and kind man. I agree with him for 70%. For 30% he has different political ideas. I do not agree with him.”

A ranking exercise with 30 persons had to indicate what Roma considered to be important aspects for evaluation of government performance. In the first place, 49.5% found it most important that officials such as the mayor and vice-mayor are *open to them*. *Openness* is the first characteristic that they expected from officials and the first aspect they evaluate. This meant open for discussions, for questions and requests. The Roma considered it highly important that the mayor greeted and talked to them in the streets, and received them in his office. They were very much aware that Roma in other parts of the country were not well received in offices and they emphasized that the opposite was true for their *comuna*. In the second place, they evaluated the mayor and the council on what they did for the *sat* in terms of the whole village and community. This was considered most important by 36.3%. Issues mentioned were the maintenance of roads and public buildings like the school. Last, they evaluated the

authorities on what they did for (their) individual families; 13.2% ranked this to be most important. Few families had submitted personal requests to the authorities. Examples were the family that requested an electricity stake and another family received a wheelchair for a disabled household member. Thus, the people differentiated attitudes from action. The survey therefore included questions on the satisfaction with the attitude of officials in their contact with the Roma. Again, the mayor received the highest scores for his 'openness' and 'receptiveness'. The vice-mayor received a slightly lower score, for the same reasons as already mentioned. The councillors were also considered open in communication, but again the Roma made a difference between *their* councillor from Nemşa and *the others*.

In general, people were quite satisfied with the way the authorities addressed the needs of the *sat*. Specific issues will be discussed in the next section. Results show that 63.3% thought that the authorities did quite well and 16.7% thought very well. Only 10% thought negative about the actions of the local government. Their criticism was mainly related to the small amount of social assistance. Respondents highlighted the renovation of the *cămin cultural* that summer. Every family from the *sat* had contributed with 100 RON. The mayor had asked for this contribution, because all families made use of the *cămin* for celebrations. Although some families had disagreed, the majority thought it was natural to contribute and in the end everyone paid.

Questions on political trust were also related to local government activities in the *sat*. Roma were asked whether they *trusted* that the authorities would help in case a problem occurred in the village. Results show that only 13.3% had no trust in the authorities at all that they would be assisted. The majority, 56.7% had a little trust in the authorities, 20% had much trust and a small minority of 10% had very much trust in the authorities that they would help the villagers in case of problems. Respondents gave the example of one of the bridges that was washed away in a heavy storm one month earlier. It was reported to the authorities and everyone was convinced the authorities would act upon it.

The same question was asked in case someone had a personal problem. How much trust did the Roma have that the local authorities will help them? Of the survey respondents said 16.7% not to have any trust that the local authorities would help. The share of people who said that they had some trust was again a majority with 63.3%, and 13.3% said they had much trust in the authorities. Only 3.3% said to have very much trust in the authorities to receive personal help. The Roma did not often go to the town hall personally and as a consequence they did not have much to tell about the officials working there. None of the Roma who went there had complaints. Of course, it is due to the distance and lack of transport that the Roma do not quickly go to Moşna themselves. However, nobody thought this to be a problem. Much could be arranged through the councillor and people addressed the mayor when he visited the *sat*. They evaluated the attitude and performance of the officials rather neutral.

Let us now look at the opinions of the local authorities. In two interviews with the mayor, he did not make a difference between the different ethnic groups in the *sat*, nor did he separate problems in Nemşa from those in the rest of the *comuna*. It was notable that he spoke of *oamenii satului* (people of the village), and never of Roma and Romanians separately. This was in contrast to the situation in the second village, as we will see in the next sections. When asking about the Roma in specific, he answered that they were *harnici* (hard working people), "but unfortunately not as wealthy as Romanians. Therefore, many of them received social assistance." He did say that the Roma might be less *gospodar* and did not know very well how to spend their money. On the other hand, he did not think that they were much to blame for their lower level of welfare. He considered the economic situation in Romania, the closing of the factories in Mediaş, and the geographical isolation of Nemşa to be the main causes of poverty. He expected from them to keep the *sat* clean and to pay their taxes in time as any other villager, and he did not have any complaints regarding these matters. As more Roma than Romanians received social assistance, they were more involved in obligatory community work. The mayor expected them to comply with this rule. Community work was organised by the councillor in Nemşa and also in this case the mayor was satisfied. Especially regarding the social relations between Roma and Romanians the *comuna* could be an example for other localities in the country.

### Interaction around critical issues

In times of elections, the authorities paid much attention to the village. This should be seen as an exceptional form of contact, as it did not have to do with day-to-day politics. Seven candidates ran for the mayor's office. Each of them came one afternoon or evening to the *cămin cultural*, to present their statements. Also in Moşna were some events in the *cămin* and several Roma declared that they attended



these happenings as well. Among the candidates were the present the mayor and the vice-mayor. From the *sat*, Roma man I. and the Romanian woman C. ran for councillors. The mayor had invited I. to join the Social Democrat Party, but I. had joined the Roma Party just before he got this offer. One comment has to be made: the mayor had chosen very strategic moments to do some renovation works in the *sat*. Just before the elections, he had all public lights constructed and roads repaired in the village. All was financed from the local budget and completely legitimate, but of course this was a very strategic move to be re-elected. Moreover, for two months all beneficiaries to the social assistance received 100% of the benefit, while the local elections were held in September and in that time of the year people receive 30%. On the day of elections, villagers went to the polls with their own family. It was of course a special day, but everything went well. The mayor and vice-mayor were thus elected. I. lost from C.

I. is a respected among the Roma, but they thought the Romanian woman to be more capable in dealing with the councillors from Moşna.

### **Social Assistance**

In the *comuna* Moşna, 280 households received social assistance (*ajutor social*). In Nemşa, 62 households were on the list of beneficiaries, of which only two Romanian. According to Nemşa's councillor, Mrs. C., these Romanian households were both newly-wed couples, who received only a very small amount of assistance. Of all survey respondents, 63.3 % received this benefit. Social assistance was paid regularly on the 6<sup>th</sup> of every month, which made it a reliable source of income. From April until October, people did not receive 100% of the amount they are entitled to. The mayor commented on this:

We did not cut the social assistance on purpose; we received only 30% of the total amount from the state. In the summer, we consider that people can find seasonal work from April. We expect them to work for the amount of RON 50, which means two days of work. They can do this; they can work for two days a month. I see healthy, young men between 30 and 40, who receive social assistance. They should not be lazy they can work in the summer. From October we think people cannot find work anymore and we pay 50% . In the harsh winter, December till March, we pay 100%.

All respondents in the survey were satisfied with the regularity of the payment. However, all families agreed that the amount was too small. Survey respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with government activities on a scale from 0 to 4, of which 0 reflects absolute dissatisfaction, 2 is neutral and 4 is very satisfied. A large share of the respondents (36.7%) was absolutely unsatisfied with the amount of social assistance and 30% were just a little satisfied. Some of them even suggested the local government did not distribute all they received from the regional authorities. I. wrote a letter to the regional authorities in Sibiu. He received a reply, saying that the local government did not do wrong.

Of each household receiving social assistance, one member was obligated to work 72 hours a month "for the community". The way in which this obligatory community work (*Prestații*) was organized was taken as indicator for the just behaviour of local authorities toward Roma. In Nemşa, the councillor was responsible for the organisation and control of the 72-hour work. The Roma agreed that the work was chosen correctly and to the benefit of the whole community. Many of them considered it very important that their village looked clean and 'organised'. The only comment they had, was that not every person was working as hard as others: "Some are smoking a cigarette in the shadow, while others are working!" (Roma man, 42)

Councillor C. kept an accurate list of households and decided what work they should do. People who received only a small amount of assistance did not have to work as much as others. Activities varied from cleaning the streets, to building bridges over streams in the fields for horses and carts. Due to heavy rainfall and floods in many parts of the country, she paid much attention to the drainages and small channels this year. The people had to clean and deepen them, to make sure all water would flow away. A heavy storm on month earlier had washed away one of the bridges over the stream in the main street. The people had proposed to repair it themselves for their community work. If the authorities would pay for the wood, they could fetch it with a cart and build a bridge. They did not have to fulfil the 72-hour work in the winters, when it was very cold and there is too much snow in the streets.

In two cases, Mrs. C. organised collective work apart from the *Prestații*. When parts of the village streets were overflowed, she called people to deepen the channels to avoid that the road would wash away. It would be on top of their community work and thus she could not oblige them to come. To

compensate, she went to the regional authorities in Sibiu and asked for extra funding. She wanted to pay more social assistance to those people that worked, as the work was heavy and lasted many hours. In a second case, she had organised a team to bring cable connection from Moşna to Nemşa. A wealthy Romanian, who had moved to Nemşa from the city, wanted cable TV and was willing to finance the costs of all materials needed. Other villagers could have cable too, if they helped to bring it to the *sat*. A cable of three kilometres long had to be placed one meter deep into the soil. Mrs. C. brought a team of people together and kept lists with names and working hours. They gathered at eight in the morning in the centre, and worked till the evening. The job was finished after ten days.

### **Infrastructure**

The local government was responsible for roads, electricity and public streetlights, channels and bridges in the main street, and the Saxon houses that they rent to families. It was an indicator of good behaviour if they did this work and whether they did the same for Roma streets as for Romanian streets. From observation and discussions with the Roma, it became clear that the authorities maintained all works mentioned, except for the Saxon houses. The explanation for this is that not all families living in Saxon houses paid their rent and as a result the authorities had no funds for renovation. One of the houses looked very well maintained and their façade looked brand new. A Roma family lived here, of which the man had a job in Mediaş and they had paid the rent from his salary.

The local government did maintain all other elements and made no difference between the Roma and Romanian streets. The survey showed that the Roma were not as satisfied with the quality of the streets as with electricity. However, one month after this survey was carried out, the authorities brought six trucks with stones to repair holes in streets where actually live only Roma. In a *şedinţă* held in the spring, the mayor decided together with the councillor and the people that small bridges in the fields around Nemşa had to be repaired. This was carried out by the people as community work for social assistance. The kindergarten, the school and the *cămin cultural* were renovated in 2004-2005. Many Roma asked me: "Have you seen our cămin? It has become very bright!" Also in the other *sat* Alma Vii the school was restored.

Regarding electricity in public places; public streetlights were everywhere in the *sat* and electricity wires were recently repaired where needed. As described in section 4.2.1, the Roma family living in the last house of Strada Brazilor was assisted to construct electricity. As a result, satisfaction with the facilitation was quite high: 50% of the respondents answered that they were satisfied and 10% said to be very satisfied.

All renovations were big expenses for a local budget. The bookkeeper in Moşna explained that hardly anything was renovated during the mayor's first mandate to save money. With these savings, they now managed to renovate the public buildings and roads. In addition, the authorities had looked for special funds from ministries and applied to the European Commission. They also managed to receive funds from their foreign acquaintances. For example, the Ministry of Transport and the French acquaintances financed the asphalt road in 2000. In an interview, the mayor told they had just 'won' a project from the European Commission and the Ministry of Education. Moşna will receive 50,000 euros from the programme *Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups, With Special Focus on Roma*. The vice-mayor had seen the Roma councillor to the Prefect, an institution at the regional authorities in Sibiu, to discuss the programme. The *comuna* then applied for this fund. This money will be used to renovate school buildings and place a heating system, but also to provide poor families, among which many Roma, with school materials. The vice-mayor, who had close connections with the Roma Party and the Roma councillor to the Prefect in Sibiu, tried to be informed on all funding possibilities.

### **Information, consultation, and involvement**

Inhabitants of Nemşa had contact with the local authorities on a number of occasions. Roma mention in the first place 'their' councillor from the *sat*: Mrs. C. It is very common to turn to her with all sorts of questions and requests, which she takes to Moşna if she could not handle issues on the spot. She said she was supposed to work two days in Moşna, but because of the many villagers coming to her house, she worked one day in Moşna and the other in Nemşa. Second, people went to Moşna on their own, which for most villagers meant a one-hour walk over the hills. Usually they needed to go for documents like birth certificates, identity papers and, in the case they are beneficiaries of the social benefit, certificates to be admitted to the hospital. In these cases they dealt with the staff in the town hall. For other requests



and special cases, they could meet with the mayor and vice-mayor. They had office hours from 9 to 11 a.m., but people came all day long. All people reported that especially the mayor was willing to receive everybody in his office, also outside consult hours.

The authorities employed several means to announce public information in the village. The local councillor played an important role in providing information. Three other ways existed. Sometimes posters were put on the walls of the two shops and the *cămin cultural*, where surely everyone would see them. As all Roma could read and write, they had access to this information. In such way, the local authorities announced the date and time of a council meeting five days in advance and included an agenda. Council meetings were open to public. The vice-mayor said in an interview that it did happen that villagers came to the meetings, although most were from Moșna, and that they came up with ideas.

Another way to provide information was 'to beat the drum'. This was a custom that is found in several places in Romania. If information or an event, like a *ședință*, had to be announced at once, a man walked through the village while beating a drum and announcing out loud what is happening. The drum was passed from father to son. Not only the authorities could use this method to make announcements, but also other families in the village.

The custom to organise a *ședință* in the *cămin cultural* is rooted in the communist period. The Communist Party used to direct orders from the higher to the local level, which were made public in these meetings. Meetings were also used to propagate nationalistic ideas. In Nemiș, the new authorities frequently came for a *ședință* to resolve the issue of land re-distribution after 1990. From what the villagers told, it appeared that for candidate mayors it then became a stake in their election campaigns; they promised to hold a *ședință* on a regular basis.

Two survey questions were related to the *ședință*. The first question asked the people to indicate how often they attend village meetings. Generally attendance was high. Half of the people attended every *ședință* and 26.7% went "almost every time". The answers "seldom" and "very rarely" were given by respectively 20% and 3.3%. Nobody answered "never". The second question asked to indicate a reason for attending the meetings. Respondents could give only one answer. Most respondents, 53.3%, opted for "it is important for my family". Less respondents, 36.7%, opted for "it is important for the community". Only 10% answered that they go "because everybody goes".

The Roma told about the issues discussed during a *ședință* and how the people interacted with the mayor and other officials. The Roma mentioned issues like taxes, renovations, legislation and administration of agricultural land. For the villagers, a *ședință* was an opportunity to request things for the *sat* or their household, but also to give comments on local government's plans.

For some issues, villagers were directly involved in decision-making during a *ședință*. This was the case when the French proposed to finance either a road or a bus. It was also customary to choose the shepherds for different animals collectively. The mayor asked anyone who is interested to apply and to mention a price. The people chose the shepherd in the following procedure:

We know all men who want to become shepherds. People who have cows choose the shepherd for the cows. People who have goats chose the shepherd for the goats. We negotiate about the price, but we also look at the person if it is someone who knows much about animals. If he knows how to remove a stone from a hoof and to disinfect. I remember from when I was a small child that the people chose shepherds in this way. (Roma man, 48)

When the shepherd was chosen, the local government provided him with an official contract, but the people themselves paid for his wage. All people that had animals pay a fee for each animal to I., one of the respected Roma and member to the association. I. administered the list of contributors and pays the wage to the shepherd.

Another example was the issue of a night guard for the agricultural land. In this case, the villagers themselves could not agree whether to employ a night guard or not. The mayor let the villagers vote during a *ședință* for a couple of times, but so far the majority did not want to contribute for a night guard. As we can see, the people were involved in issues that relate to the level of the *sat* only. When it came to taxes or allocation of funds to renovate public buildings in the *sat*, it was the government that decided. However, the mayor said they had not increased taxes for land in the last four years, because the villagers had complained that they did not have enough money.

Formally, the Roma were represented by the vice-mayor and two Roma councillors. As was said, the Roma had more confidence in their councillor than in any other councillor from Moșna. One other Roma man from Nemșa stood as a candidate in the local elections, but the most Roma voted for the Romanian woman. A Roma man, M. said, smiling:

Our present councillor is very straight and resolute. She dares to speak, she knows to help everybody. Our I. (the Roma candidate) is more of speaking and less action. He is more philosophical. Yes, he is wise. But the people preferred somebody who acts.

Association *Fraternitate* also counted as an official body that represents the Roma interests and should maintain dialogue with the authorities. So far, the members of the association fulfilled this task only in respect to the school and goat projects.

As has become clear, the villagers had possibilities to participate in politics during a *ședință*. They were heard and, to some extent, they are involved in decision making. In turn, the authorities have the possibility to ask the people's opinions. Results from the survey show that 53.3% of the Roma said to be 'not very satisfied' and 26.7% was 'satisfied' with the way the authorities consulted the Roma, 10% declared to be neutral, and 6.7% was very unsatisfied.

### **Linking people's expectations and government actions**

Let us look again at the ideas of the Roma about their needs and see whether these were compatible with the ideas of the local authorities. As we have seen in section 5.2 the people expected the members of the local government to be open and receptive. As became clear from the survey, the authorities did meet this expectation. The Roma agreed that their biggest needs were opportunities for employment, better roads, and transport to the city, a permanent doctor, and some think it better to have a night guard. They do not expect the local authorities to be able to resolve the unemployment problem. Two other needs, public transport and a permanent doctor, they did not submit to any of the officials. They only spoke about this among themselves and nobody recalled that any of them have put requests to the authorities about the issues. The issue of roads was negotiated. When the mayor visited Nemșa after heavy rainfall to see what damage was done, people asked for stones to improve the streets in the *sat*. This also counted for the issue of a night guard, but in this case the villagers themselves disagreed. The mayor used the *ședință* as a platform to discuss about the matter. The *cămin cultural* was renovated that summer. It were the villagers who had brought this issue in a *ședință*.

Like the Roma, the mayor and vice-mayor thought the biggest problem in the *sat* was unemployment. The mayor was hopeful that the Dutch organization, Heifer, wanted to finance a collecting point for goat milk, which would enable the villagers to sell their milk on the market. He also mentioned to maintain good relations with the Labour Office in Mediaș and tried to send people there. Regarding the expectations of the villagers, the mayor thought some of the poor households expected too much at once. The local authorities had no budget to make everything right now. Both the mayor and the vice-mayor tried to find complementary funding, apart from what they received from the county council. As for the roads, six trucks with stones were brought one month after the storms. In the *ședință* of October 2005, the villagers asked for more stones to be brought to the end of the *sat*, upon which the mayor promised that more trucks were ordered. Thus, those issues the villagers pushed forward themselves, were negotiated. They did not book success on the amount of social assistance, but the mayor was receptive for the quality of the roads and the issue of a night guard.

### **Conclusion**

This section described the social economic position of the Roma in Nemșa and showed that they had fewer opportunities to access the labour market than Romanians. It also showed that the Roma did participate in the social and political spheres of the *comuna*. Networks of reciprocity were strong among themselves, but between Roma and Romanians this relationship was much more formal. On the other hand, they equally participated in each other's festivities. Although the Roma had less assets, they were involved in all other elements of village life.

Social networks among the Roma were quite horizontally structured. A few Roma were respected for what they did to the community, but none of them had the authority to tell others what to do. People were familiar with collective decision making within the institution of the *Vecinătate*. Leadership over





this form of organisation rotated and member decided collectively how the money that was left was to be spend. The administrative system used for the Roma *Vecinătate* for funerals, was later copied for the administration of the Heifer goat project. The success of the school project and the Heifer goat project may be explained by the skills Roma and Romanians had already acquired through these village traditions. The Roma were also able to participate in all stages of the projects, because all had a certain level of education. It needs to be said that much of the Roma's social activity was possible, because they had at least a minimum of assets. They emphasised how they helped each other with work. This is only possible because they *had work* to do, on their land and with their houses. They had tools to lend out and had a certain minimum that could be shared.

Interaction with the local authorities was partly mediated by the local councillor, Mrs. C., also, interaction was institutionalised in a *ședință*. Although the people still thought that the local authorities were more interested in Moșna than in Nemșa, in recent years the authorities had carried out just as many activities in the *sat* as in the *centru de comună*, where is seated the local administration. The *ședință* offered the people the possibility to comment, request and also to participate in decision making. Roma and Romanians participated equally. Although it used to be a communist habit, it was continued after the regime change.

In general, the Roma were quite satisfied with local government performance. This was partly caused by the open attitude of local officials, especially the mayor. On the other hand, they also expressed to be satisfied with specific activities. What was remarkable, was that many Roma agree with a certain degree of complementarity between government actions and the people. "If they provide the resources, we will do the manual work", was something many of them confirmed. Although not everyone was happy with the authorities, many tried to see it in a broader perspective. They reflected on the general situation in Romania or indicated that the present national government was a liberal one and not a social government.

On the side of the local authorities, it can be stated that they addressed needs of the whole *sat*, of all villagers, and did not discriminate against Roma. The authorities put efforts in finding extra funding, whether from Romanian state institutions or through foreign acquaintances. The openness of the mayor, the vice-mayor and the local councillor may be personal attributes, but the people's expectations that they should be open and the vote they had to cast, may have influenced that the officials actually were responsive. The existing situation in Nemșa, with its social activities, its history, and people being very familiar with one another, may have resulted in responsive governance.

## Roma in Ogra. A growing community, increasing needs

■ Ogra is a *comuna* situated in Mureș county, a district named after the Mureș river. The main road from Târgu Mureș to Cluj-Napoca leads through the *comuna* Ogra. Coming from Târgu Mureș it is about 20 kilometres to this village close to the Mureș river. Minibuses connect the city to all villages belonging to Mureș county that are located along the road and run every fifteen minutes. Before one reaches Ogra, the winding road runs through several other smaller and larger *comuna*'s and fields. A couple of times, one passes by long-shaped barns so typical for the communist era. Most of them are abandoned, but some are put into use by new landowners. Houses have the typical trenches in front and many people grow vines in their gardens. The farming lands around the villages are mostly used for cattle and corn. North from the road, one can catch a glimpse from the Mureș river.

In Ogra, the minibus stops in the centre, just in front of the newly built public garden with a bust of Romania's national poet Mihai Eminescu. What the villagers call 'centre' is an open space along the road, flanked by the public garden, in front of the row with two shops, two bars, the pharmacy, and the small post office. Here the villagers have their conversations about animals, land, and the weather. In the evenings the sound of rumouring voices comes from the bars. A bit further down the road is the town hall. This grey building is a clear trace from the communist period, with Romanian flags flapping in the wind. The *cămin cultural* is attached to the town hall. It is in need of renovation, but still used for festivities and events.

The busy road thus divides the village into a northern and a southern part. The centre and the town hall are on the northern side. On this side are also the Orthodox Church and the Hungarian Reformed

Church. Most Romanians and Hungarians live in the northern part and, since a couple of years, also a few Roma families live here. Houses on this side are large and many have large vegetable gardens. Shallow channels in front of the houses drain all rainwater away to the Mureş river. South from the road one can see one row of Romanian and Hungarian houses. At the back of these houses, three to four meter high fences surround the back yards. These fences mark the end of the Romanian and Hungarian part and the first street of the Roma quarter. Differences are clearly visible. Only few houses are made of bricks and many roofs are constructed of straw and a piece of nylon. Streets are very uneven. As here are no channels, the streets change into pools of mud after rainfall. Only two electricity stakes rise above the Roma quarter and public street lights were never installed. Most families tap their electricity illegally from the two stakes or from neighbours. The Roma refer to their neighbourhood as *cartier*, which is the Romanian word for quarter. Romanians and Hungarians say *țigănie* or “that quarter on the other side of the road”. Only the first street of the *cartier* has a name, Strada Unirii, but not all Roma know about this.

Ogra is a *comuna* with seven smaller villages, the *sat*, scattered around it. Research was carried out in the village Ogra itself; this is the *centru de comună*. The total population of the *comuna* is 2441, of which 64% lives in Ogra village. The ethnic composition of the *comuna* as was recorded in the 2002 official census is 1,266 Romanians (51.86 %) 634 Hungarians (25.97 %) and 537 Roma (21.99 %) <sup>3</sup>. Roma mostly live in the *centru de comună* and not in the *sat*. According to the mayor, Mr. M., this number was fairly accurate. He told that most Roma did declare their ethnic identity, for all spoke the Roma language *Romani*. He thought the actual number of Roma living in the *comuna* Ogra would be just slightly higher. One of the local councillors, who is Roma and living in the Roma quarter, thought that the number of Roma was actually higher. His estimation was based on the number of houses in the Roma *cartier*. The Roma quarter consisted of approximately a hundred houses. In the total *comuna* 960 were houses registered, of which 555 houses in Ogra village. The Roma councillor considered that Roma households were larger than Romanian or Hungarian households and in some cases two or three Roma households lived together in one house. Therefore, he estimated that the Roma made up for at least 25% to 30% of the village population.

Roma from Ogra did not know why their people once settled here, or whether their ancestors came from a particular Roma group. What they *did know* was that their number used to be much smaller. In communist times, the Roma quarter was only one street large with a few other houses in the field behind it. In most houses lived more than one household. For Roma said that, the expansion of the Roma quarter was the most important development of the past 10 to 15 years. Asking about changes in their neighbourhood in the 1990s, many of them replied: “Now so many more families live here in *cartier*” and “Now we have more streets. The quarter has become large, but people have nothing”. Also the Romanian and Hungarian villagers mentioned the expansion of the Roma quarter. In their opinion, this was due to the large Roma families:

The *țigani* have many more children. They always had! Sometimes six or seven children in a household. In communist times were only few *țigani* here. Now you see how many there are. After ten years, they will be the majority in Ogra! (Hungarian villager)

The Roma cited a few other reasons. For a long time, the police did not verify whether people lived legally in Ogra. Thus, several Roma families moved in from different places. As Ogra is situated along a connecting road it was easy to reach. Also, it often happened that a man found a wife in another village, who moved in with his family. The previous mayor allocated a few hectares of land to the Roma in the end of the 1990's. Young families and newly wed couples received a small piece of land to build their own house. This measure greatly reduced the problem of overcrowded houses. As a result, from 1999-2001 two new streets were added to the *cartier* around 30 small houses.

### The Communist Legacy

When speaking about their living conditions, Roma adults repeatedly referred to their fortunate lives under communist rule. Time and again, they emphasised that they never had to worry about food and that no differences existed between ethnic groups. However, one of the schoolteachers told that the conditions in the *cartier* were at present actually better than in communist times:

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<sup>3</sup> A complete data base of the 2002 national census can be found on [www.edrc.ro](http://www.edrc.ro). Population numbers are given per county and locality, specifying for ethnic identity and mother language.





Then their quarter was much less organised. The yards had no fences and animals were walking everywhere, making everything dirty. The people did not have toilets, no toilet boxes in the garden. All children had lice. They came to school dirty. Parents could buy school uniforms, but these were not compulsory. Now it is a little better in the *cartier*. Now they built fences and toilets. Some houses have electricity now. The pupils I taught in Ceaușescu's time are now parents themselves. They have had at least some education and are a bit more *gospodar*. (Ms. Sz., primary school teacher)

The older Roma, however, never related the communist period to the way their neighbourhood was 'organised'. They only recalled how they enjoyed a certain basic level of livelihood. They acknowledged that conditions were far from wealthy, but at least they enjoyed an income and social services.

Then we had work! We worked altogether for the collectives and we received corn, vegetables, and a little bit of money! I did not have to worry about tomorrow. I worked for what I needed and I received it. Everyone worked together; it did not matter whether you were Hungarian or *țigan*. (Roma man, 45)

My husband and I worked for the CAP. When I had small children, I stayed home, but when they were older I went again. Everything was so good in the past! The whole *comuna* was working. I don't remember how many *echipă*, so many! And everybody together, Romanians, Hungarians and us *țigani*. (Roma woman, 53)

The Roma spoke so much of "the good communist times" that it was even difficult to receive information about how their work was organised. After one sentence with factual information, they would only say 'everything was better then!', after which they started talking about their problems to make a living. Slowly they gave some insights on what kind of work they actually did. Most of them worked for the *Cooperativa Agricolă de Producție* (CAP), on the land and on cattle breeding farms. The elderly worked in the large vegetable garden. Each family, including Roma families, received 15 are to use as a private garden and to cultivate for their own purpose. One Roma woman described how she had to combine work on the CAP with keeping the household:

Because we had the garden, we survived. My husband had died young. I had to look after my children. They were still very small. So, I could not work enough for the CAP to have one *norm*. I did not get much food from the CAP, but I could grow some potatoes in my garden. (Roma woman, 53)

The engineer, who was employed in the town hall, used to be chief of a *brigade* until 1975 and President of the CAP from 1975 to 1991. He gave more information on how work was organised in the *comuna*. A total of 2,000 hectares was used for agriculture and cattle breeding. The long barns on the west side of the village still reminded of the CAPs. Indeed, every family had its private vegetable garden of 15 are. Before 1976, people worked the land in two *brigades*. Each comprised three teams, *echipă*, of 30 to 40 people. The teams were mixed; Hungarians, Romanians and Roma worked together, but only Romanians were chiefs and administrators. Most Roma worked with the animals. According to the engineer:

Only some of the older *țigani* worked on the land, because only they were *harnici*. And they knew how they had to work it. The younger one worked more with the animals. Around 40% of the village population worked for the CAP. Most worked for cattle breeding farms. But most people from Ogra worked in the factories in Târgu Mureș. Not the Roma, because they did not have enough education to work in the factories.

As everywhere in the country, the organisation of agricultural production was directed from central level. The local administration did not decide what to produce; the county ordered the directors of the *brigade* - and later the firms - what to cultivate. After a reorganisation in 1976, six agricultural firms were

created. From this moment, people worked more for firms instead of in *echipă*. In the 1980's production shifted to cattle breeding and only three firms remained. Several Roma recalled they had attended the *ședință* in the *cămin cultural*. In these meetings, the local government told how many *norme* (amounts of products and working hours) the people had to produce and what they would receive for their work. Other Roma said they never attended these meetings, because the Roma were not allowed to enter. As several Roma could mention the issues discussed in meetings, it is likely that the authorities did not prohibit the Roma to attend the meetings.

All labour activity was strictly administered. After the orders from the county level, the directors of the *brigades* or firms calculated how many *norme* the people had to produce. The chief and staff of the firms accurately administered names and working hours of the people. Thus, people were paid after the amount of *norme* they had produced and received goods and small amounts of money in the end of the month. It was an obligation to work, although someone did not receive severe sanctions if he did not show up for agricultural work. A person would simply have less working hours registered and consequently received smaller portions. For those working at the animal farms, rules were a bit stricter. The engineer gave the example that a person, who came 3 hours late for two days, would receive two days less working hours from the administration. Another method was to warn a family that it might lose its private garden. The older Roma do not recall that they had a strict schedule.

Many villagers were employed in the factories in Târgu Mureș. In order to become employed in a factory, one had to complete eight grades of education. Roma had had very little education and as a consequence only two or three Roma men worked in the factories. To avoid problems with the communist regime at county level, teachers let all pupils pass to the next grade every year, but actually few of the Roma could read or write.

After the revolution, a new local government was installed. A mayor was put to office, who stayed only a few months. Then a new mayor was elected, Mr. V., who served three mandates. He was mayor until 2004 and was then replaced by Mr. M. who was the son of the communist mayor who had held office during the last 15 years of communism.

Like in Nemșa, the first task of the new local government was to redistribute agricultural land to former owners. Land from the collectives had to be returned and also the private gardens were to be re-distributed. This process took place in a completely different form compared to the way it was organised in Nemșa. After the collapse of communism, the collectives did not immediately close. According to the engineer, the CAPs did not close until 1991 and the land was only afterwards re-distributed to the former owners. What happened was that many of the former officials appointed themselves as members in a commission for land distribution. In the words of the engineer "They had the first right and they chose others." An older Hungarian man told how the commission distributed land to people, using old maps:

They were important people, like former police officer and chiefs of brigades. Many were relatives and they gave much land to themselves. They also made sure their relatives received a good piece of land. One high police officer... his family owned not one gram of land before communism. Now he is the biggest landowner of Ogra!

Another villager explained that many people did receive back their land, but that the members of the commission took much from the reserves. Also, much land belonged to older people, who were unable to cultivate it. Members of the commission bought this land for a very cheap price, without making public that it was for sale. Some villagers were still waiting to be given back their land. To re-establish the exact borders was a source conflict between families.

Of course, by law 18/1991 was stipulated that people who had worked a certain number of years for the collectives, had to receive 80 are of land. The engineer presented a table, showing family names and the size of land they received. Of the 30 Roma families that had worked for the CAP, seven families received land. Apparently, other Roma families had not worked enough years to be entitled to a piece of land. All Roma families sold their piece immediately.

With the closing down of the CAPs and abolishment of the private gardens, the Roma had to find new sources of income. This was complicated by their low level of education, even though many adults were in the possession of a diploma. It was thus impossible to find a job in Târgu Mureș and they had to look for other job opportunities. Roma recalled two distant places where many of them went for temporary work. Many went to work in factories near Sibiu, but most Roma found work at the Black



Sea in Mangalia. They would stay away from home for weeks or months. They found jobs in the tourist industry, in restaurants, public lavatories and other touristy places for the summer. Those Roma who did these jobs for many years, managed to save money and now live in better houses on the north side of the road. The dormitories where the Roma were accommodated used to be free of charge. This changed a few years ago and they were now obliged to pay for this accommodation. Since then, they could no longer afford to do seasonal work in Mangalia and the Roma now had to look for agricultural daily labour in Ogra and neighbouring villages. Nowadays, only two Roma still left to the coast each summer. Since two years, a few Roma have been able to find temporary work in Hungary. Roma from Sînpaul, a neighbouring village, were the first to establish a relation with Hungarian employers and passed these acquaintances to Roma in Ogra. Five Roma from Ogra worked in Hungary this summer and they earned a sum of money that they would never have made in agricultural work. However, for most Roma it would remain impossible to obtain a passport and to use this opportunity.

Thus, living conditions quickly changed after the fall of communism. Most Roma recalled the sudden insecurity about what would happen tomorrow. Although some Roma used to have job opportunities in other parts of the country, these possibilities had now disappeared. Several households used the opportunity to build houses after land was allocated in the late nineties by the previous mayor. Although this improved their living conditions, the high unemployment rate and an increasing population made the Roma feel that their situation was deteriorating. As was already mentioned, the Roma considered the expansion of their *cartier* to be the most important change. This had strong consequences for the social relations in the quarter, as a large share of the Roma did not know each other well. One old Roma woman explained why this change was not a change for the good:

Strange people came here. Many of them were drinking! In Ceaușescu's time people were not allowed to drink. The police would catch you if you drank! The new people argue and drink! (Roma woman, 72)

The issue of social relations among Roma and between Roma and the majority population will be elaborated in the next section. For the moment it is enough to say that, after the regime change, no violent riots occurred in the village. Romania was shocked by clashes between Romanians and ethnic Hungarians in Târgu Mureș in 1993. Also Roma from the city were involved in these incidents. People from Ogra said it has always been quiet in their village. In communist times, the majority of the population was Hungarian. After the revolution many Romanians moved to Ogra and Hungarians left to the city. The growing Roma population did not lead to violent conflicts with the majority, but it did have consequences for social relations in their quarter.

### **Living conditions of the Roma in Ogra**

Differences between living conditions of the Roma and the majority population were striking and clearly visible. Houses were small, ran down, and crowded. Houses in the first street of the *cartier*, which was the oldest street, were made of bricks. Families living in these houses were able to build brick houses with what they earned from the collectives and loans from the banc. Only four other houses in the *cartier* were made of bricks. The rest of the people made their houses of wood and mud, or only mud, and houses often lacked windows and had ramshackle roofs. Clay houses had to be repaired each year, because wind and rain leave the walls with cracks. Summer was the ideal period to do these renovations, but most Roma needed this time to find seasonal work.

Besides the poor quality of houses, also the infrastructure was poor. As was already mentioned, the Roma had serious trouble to reach their houses after heavy rainfall, because the streets lacked channels and appropriate stones. The mud made it difficult for Roma children to reach the school and made them concerned about their clothes. It was impossible to keep their clothes clean and consequently their teachers reproved them. On request of the Roma man who was member to the local council, one truck with stones was delivered. This was exactly enough to renovate the street from the beginning of the *cartier* up to his house, which was the fourth house from the edge of the quarter.

Another problem was the lack of clean drinking water and electricity. A few wells in the *cartier* had to serve a large population and the water was far from clean. Each well belonged to a family, which meant that other families had to make certain agreements on the use of the water. One woman told that the family whose well she used was going to clean it and she was expected to pay a contribution. To a certain extent, the consumption of water was thus exploited. Two electricity stakes rose from the

neighbourhood. Successive administrations promised to install electricity in the whole *cartier*, but so far nobody lived up to this promise.

In the whole *comuna*, 119 households received social assistance. Of these households, 83 lived in Ogra village and they were all Roma families. The situation was recently complicated by new conditions added to the law on social assistance. In order to obtain social assistance, beneficiaries had to register at the Labour Office in Iernut every three months. After registration, beneficiaries received a note, saying that they were entitled to receive the allowance. Beneficiaries were also entitled to free hospital admittance and to obtain the certificate for free admittance one needs this note as well. However, a new law was implemented, that obliged beneficiaries to follow courses organised by the Labour Office. If someone had not followed a course, the necessary note was not issued. Not one of the Roma from Ogra followed a vocational course. It thus happened that Roma needed to see a doctor in the hospital, but they did not obtain a certificate from the local authorities. Hence, they were unable to see a doctor for free. They had no resources to pay for consultation. Consequently, they did not have access to health care.

Some Roma households were entitled to various types of state allowances, but for several reasons they were excluded from these services. In most cases these Roma lacked identity papers or other documents required to receive assistance. On top of this, people did not know where to go or how to make the required documents in order. Two examples: one is a single-parent household, composed of a mother and 3 daughters, of which the oldest daughter had a baby. The oldest daughter left school when she got pregnant and was abandoned by her boyfriend. The second daughter is mentally handicapped and should receive an allowance for disabled persons. The youngest daughter was still in primary school. The only stable income of this household was child allocation for the youngest daughter. The handicapped girl did not have an identity paper and therefore the family did not receive the allowance for disabled persons. The mother tried to find seasonal work and sometimes did small jobs for Romanian and Hungarian households in the village. At the same time, she had to take care of the handicapped child and of the youngest daughter who was in primary school, and to help the oldest daughter with her baby. The mud house had only one room with two beds. The walls had cracks and should be restored with new mud, but the mother simply had no time to fix it, else the family had no food. She did not have relatives who would help her to repair the house.

The other example is of a household with seven children. If everything was arranged properly, they would receive child allocation for seven children. One of the children dropped out from school and thus was no longer entitled to child allocation. Three children had no birth certificates. Two of the certificates were eaten by the rats in the house. The third child, a twelve-year-old boy, had never had a birth certificate. Formally, he did not exist. As it was not possible to enrol in primary school without a birth certificate, the boy had never had any education. He hardly spoke Romanian, only *Romani*, which will limit his job opportunities when he is growing up. The parents were afraid to go to Târgu Mureş to have him registered, as it would be a difficult and long procedure, facing many officials and also police. Regarding the two certificates that were lost, the parents thought it was extremely expensive to make new ones. They thought it would cost them RON 50 for each certificate, while the actual price was RON 2,4. Thus, they received child allocation for only 3 children instead of seven. Similar stories existed for another 10 families, all of which lacked some documents or do not know how to get access to social security.

Apart from financial resources, Roma hardly had any other sources to sustain in their livelihood. Nobody owns land for agriculture and only a few families had some animals (Table 6.4). Only three families had a garden to grow vegetables. Most families did not have space to make a garden, while a few others did have space, but they did not make one.

Two major concerns for Roma families in Ogra are the quality of the houses and making sure that the family had a meal. Food and housing are, of course, central tasks for any family, but the Roma faced circumstances that made it extremely difficult to fulfil these needs. Competition for daily labour was high and the demand for labour was seasonal. They often expressed their feelings of insecurity about their conditions. Most of them could not afford to buy materials and were therefore forced to use mud, which was not lasting long. The Roma themselves referred to their poverty situation on many occasions:

I have six children. I cannot send them to school. They need good clothes, a bag and you have to give them some food to take to school. We don't have money for that. Allocation would not be enough." (Roma woman, 38)



As gathering wood was illegal, the Roma had to buy wood from the forester. Apparently, last year they had not received the compensation they were entitled to. Whereas some families spent money on buying wood, others took the risk to be caught in the forest and collected wood illegally. Several Roma were caught by the police and received penalties or were harassed. It was thus not surprising that houses, roads and support for heating were ranked high. The need for electricity was ranked by 12.5% of the respondents. Some families said to have enough money to pay for electricity, but not for the electricity stakes, the cables and meters. Other tapped electricity from relatives, but would rather be independent. Last, the need for employment opportunities was ranked by only 6.25% of the respondents. The upcoming winter and the problems with rain probably explain why employment was ranked on the last place. When asking the Roma about their needs, actually everybody pointed at day-to-day needs and effects from poverty. Therefore, I also carried the exercise to draw a problem tree, in order to find out what the Roma considered to be main causes of poverty. A group of four women and three men gathered in a backyard to participate in the exercise. They put seven problems and needs in the leaves of the tree: social assistance, houses, electricity, health care, roads, employment, and heating. Notably, in many occasions they had lengthy discussions on the lack of money for everything they wanted to do, without discussing *why* they did not have enough money. Thus, having no money to buy building materials was not related to unemployment. They would rather mention that the local authorities had retained their social allowance. From the discussions it became clear that they actually did not know exactly the official rules for receiving social assistance and compensation for heating. In a few occasions, they looked for solutions in what others could do. This was either the local government, but they also knew about a project in Țipou, a nearby village. Apparently, foreigners had carried out a housing project and Roma now lived in relatively good houses. It had been a church-based initiative and families regularly received food packages. Participants thought this would be a good idea for Ogra as well and even asked whether I was able to initiate such a project.

Broadly speaking after the regime change, Roma in Ogra were left with nothing. The Commission for land redistribution carried out its task in such manner, that actually no family could profit from the land reserves. Romanian and Hungarian families could cultivate the land that was given back to their families and many retained work in the factories. In contrast, the Roma lost any form of employment and also lost their private gardens. Ogra's location on the side of the main road attracted Roma from other localities, which led to a rapid expansion of the Roma *cartier*. The Roma population in Ogra thus rapidly increased, while resources such as seasonal work were scarce. This was one of the reasons that conditions in the quarter could not improve. As we will see in the next section, this also led to a competitive sphere in the quarter.

Roma in Ogra lived segregated from the majority population. This segregation was clearly marked by the asphalt road. Apart from this geographic distance, differences between their environment and 'the north side' where lives the majority were clearly visible. Roma faced severe living conditions. They lacked conditions that should be provided by public services, like infrastructural works. They also lacked assets to improve their housing conditions. Lack of employment opportunities in the *comuna*, transport costs to the city and especially a lack of education limited their opportunities to improve their situation. For their livelihood, they were largely dependent on state allowances such as Child Allocation and social assistance, of which the latter was not paid for six months. Many tried to find work in the summer period, but the demand for labour was small. Finding seasonal work was especially difficult for those families that did not have enough manpower. In case a household was ran by a single adult, this person had to take care of the house, the children, and food. Several families lacked the necessary documents to obtain special state allowance, and did not know how to complete their files. The Roma reflected sometimes quite emotionally upon these harsh living conditions. They also reflected the feeling that they could not do anything about their situation, nor was anyone else interested to do something for them. It seemed like these feelings of despair lead to a certain passive attitude regarding their conditions. It also led to certain conflicts between families. We will return to this issue in the following section.

### **Social Relations in Ogra**

The Roma community was marked by a lack of social cohesion. Many stories reflected a competitive sphere among the people in the *cartier*. Seasonal work was an important source of income during summer, but there was not enough work for everyone. The Roma reported several other reasons for disputes, like theft or arguing children, after which the parents started arguing too. In other cases it was gossip that came out, a card games that was lost, or a loan that was not paid back in time. Also alcohol

gave rise to disputes in many situations. The people told that Roma often have a *scandal*, dispute, in the streets. Indeed, a few times a week you could see people arguing in the quarter. People screamed out loud to each other, raised their arms high in the air, and clenched their fists. One woman said that, a few times a year, these fights had resulted in violence and the police had to come to the *cartier* to end the conflict. Conflicts like these sometimes resulted in families that remained opponents. The Roma often used the words *împotrivă* or *dusman*, respectively opponents and enemy.

Apart from this low level of cohesion, the community was characterised by an unequal social structure. Inequality was caused by differences in assets, but especially the family of the Roma councillor was particularly influential. A lack of trust was reflected in the density and quality of existing social networks in the quarter. It may be clear that the situation as it was, was not a fruitful basis for networks of help among people. Indeed, networks of reciprocity were limited.

This resulted in a lack of collective action. It may be clear that the situation in the quarter did not provide a fruitful, stable basis to enhance cooperation between Roma and between the different ethnic groups. One example illustrated this situation. Roma told how the previous mayor, Mr. V., had donated 4 electricity stakes to the Roma. These stakes were left after construction works on the edge of the *comuna*. Mr. V. arranged horses and a cart to fetch the stakes. The only thing the Roma had to do was to go there and bring them back to the *cartier*. Apparently, the Roma could not work out who would go there and do the work. They did not even discuss about the matter, they did not take any steps. Thus, nothing happened.

Inter-ethnic relations were very limited. The Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center, an NGO focusing on the improvement of interethnic relations, helped to establish a formal Community Based Organisation in Ogra. At the start in 2002, the initiative group of this CBO, called *Interetnica*, was composed of 4 Romanians, 4 Hungarians, and 3 Roma. *Interetnica* started with a project to improve the school building, the meeting room in the town hall, and to renovate a small room in the town hall that could function as the association's office. Many villagers, including Roma, participated in the school project.

The position of the executive director, Mr. Sz., was crucial for the following phases of the CBO. He mapped out a new course for *Interetnica* and chose to collaborate with an NGO from Bucharest, which ran a programme called Theatre Forum. Formal aim of the program was to bring different ethnic groups together and perform a theatre play to make social issues such as discrimination and interethnic relations negotiable. Although Mr. Sz. had only good intentions, he had attained such a dominant position that he made it impossible for others come with initiatives. He actually made *Interetnica* his personal project for cultural activities. He bypassed the original aim of the programme and to perform plays and dances was no longer an instrument, but became an aim in itself. While especially the Hungarian youth became very involved, because finally they had something to do in their leisure time, the Roma gradually withdrew from the activities.

### **Interaction around critical issues**

This section focuses on critical events and issues that shaped the relation between the local authorities and Roma. To obtain a better understanding of the relation between the Roma and local authorities, it is necessary to present a full account of the 2004 local elections. Happenings before and after the elections had a profound impact on this relation and also on the Roma quarter. Subsequently, this section describes the opinion of the Roma on the authorities and how these opinions are shaped. These issues will be again the social benefit, infrastructure in the Roma quarter, how the authorities provide information, and how they involve Roma in community issues.

#### **Events 1: Local Elections**

The local elections of 2004 were characterised by a series of events, which strongly affected the relationship between the Roma and the local authorities. Key figures were the candidates for mayor, Mr. V. and Mr. M., and the Roma councillor I. Mr. V. had served three mandates as a mayor and was supported by the Roma councillor, who was councillor during V's third term. Candidate M. did not refrain from clandestine methods to win votes. Roma councillor I. was employed in a factory close to Târgu Mureş. M. was acquainted with one of I.'s supervisors. Before the election campaigns started, he tried to force I. to persuade the Roma to vote for him. M. said he would make sure that I. B. would lose his job if I. refused to collaborate. However, V. was acquainted with the director and through this acquaintance I. was hired in the first place. V's acquaintance was thus higher placed than M's and I.'s job was secured.



However, also the Roma councillor's moves were questionable. I. was on the Roma Party election list with 4 other Roma from Ogra. They got an argument about which candidate mayor to support. As I. had very good relations with V., he thus wanted campaign for him. Two others wanted to support the new candidate, M. Being the President of the local branch of the Roma Party, I. cut these two men off the list. One of the men, G., then started to collaborate with M. and actively campaigned among the Roma, while I. campaigned for V. On the day of elections, candidate I. went with one 'team' of Roma to vote for V. Two hours later, G. took 'his' team to the polling place. I. has seen exactly who supported him and V., and who was in the other team with G. and M. M. won the elections for mayor. I. was elected to the local council and thus won institutional powers. Since then, I. was reluctant to assist those Roma households that voted against him. Using informal methods, he like not helping others to fill in formal documents, he made it more difficult for several families to gain access to public services.

V. and M. both had the opportunity to campaign, but it was mostly M. who campaigned. V. came to the quarter and said he could not make promises. He tried to explain much depended on the state government. If the Social Democrats would win the national elections and remained the leading party in the government, then the *comuna* would have money to do projects. If the winner would be the Liberal Party, then not much budget would be allocated for social purposes. M., on the other hand, promised to improve the roads, install gas, construct electricity and attract a housing project. The reason for many Roma to believe him was that he used to be a high-ranking officer from the Târgu Mureş police department. People expected him to have important acquaintances and influence in the regional council. Consequently, they expected that he was able to attract substantial funding. Apart from these promises, M. amply treated on meat, food, and alcohol as part of his campaign. We will see that he gained votes through his promises, but not keeping his promises made him very unpopular later on.

### **Events 2: Police raids**

The following event had profound impact on the way Roma think about government institutions. The quarter was confronted with two raids carried out by the police force from the regional authorities. One raid (*razia*), occurred quite recently in 2004, the other one approximately 4 years ago. It was difficult to reconstruct what happened during the raid in the nineties and what was the motive. In August 2004, the police units from Târgu Mureş came at four o'clock in the morning, masked and armed. They lifted everyone from their beds and asked for identification documents. Some Roma said the police knocked politely on the doors, others said they were shouting and persuasive. Those Roma who could not hand over their documents at once, or those who protested, were taken to the front of the quarter. Many Roma recalled that those Roma were beaten and taken to the police office in Ogra. Roma had two ideas about what caused the second raid. One story was that the police was looking for illegal inhabitants, as the authorities wanted to get rid of illegal Roma. The other story was that the police came looking for a man who had argued with a policeman from Ogra, the night before in the local bar. Apparently, the man had punched the policeman in the face. In any case, the police took the Roma without documents to the office, where they had to spend some hours in jail and they were fined. The Roma councillor went to the mayor, V. at the time, to pledge that these fines were reversed. V. arranged this with the regional authorities. The way some Roma told about this event was remarkable. Some were very angry and saw this event as evidence that it were always the Roma who were accused, by any authority. Others seemed to think this was a very normal procedure. The masked police, the early hour, the way they were treated, the shouting, the beating, the fact that they came *only* into the Roma quarter; they considered it logical, because it was their own fault that not all of them had identity papers. Like one Roma woman said:

That is what they do if people have no papers. They were not bad for me. They knocked the door and after I showed my papers we could go back to sleep. Others, like the man in the first street who is often drunk, they took to the road. Probably he had been drinking again and said stupid things to the policemen.



## Critical Issues

### **Social Assistance**

The people had not received social assistance for six months, which caused insecurity about how to sustain their families. It is thus not surprising that all survey respondents said to be 'absolutely unsatisfied' with both the amount of assistance and the regularity of payment. According to the Roma councillor to the Prefect in Târgu Mureş, the county council had received very few resources from the state to pay social assistance. Therefore, every *comuna* in Mureş county had received only 60% of the full amount of the social benefit. Hence, the local authorities were not to be blamed for the small amounts they paid. However, we could criticize the motives of the authorities for the irregular disbursement of the social benefit. The local government had decided not to spread the payment of the benefit over more than four months. As the vice-mayor explained:

*Țigani* have to work 72 hours a month for social assistance. It is difficult to organise. They won't come if they receive only small amounts for many months. They are lazy. So, we pay them a bigger amount for only few months. Else it is no use for us. Besides, in the summer they will try to find seasonal work. Then they won't come to work at all. Why would they come to work for *Prestații*, if they can make 20 Lei a day in agriculture? They would not show up anymore! (Vice-mayor, Mr. V.)

In Nemşa, the authorities spread the payment over a longer period, to make sure that families had at least some financial income every month. Of course, it is up to people's own responsibility how they spent their money. It could be considered paternalistic if the local authorities decided to spread the payment over a longer period, to avoid that Roma would not spend all their money at once. However, it was not out of principle that the authorities in Ogra chose for payment within a short period of time. They only thought about the *Prestații* and how to benefit from it.

This brings us to the work people have to do, *Prestații*, for social assistance. Under the previous mayor, V., it was the Roma councillor's responsibility to organise the work and control the working hours of the Roma. After the local elections, this task was shifted to the vice-mayor. Apart from the cleaning work in the centre, the Roma were often put to work to deepen the channels in the Romanian and Hungarian streets. In the minutes of the council meetings, I found that deepening the channels was a responsibility of every household. Every villager had to maintain the channel in front of his own house. Hence, this should not be delegated to the people working for *Prestații*. Also, the Roma reported that they had to paint the fences of the councillors' residencies. Obviously, the sort of work they had to do cannot be considered community work.

### **Infrastructure**

It was clearly visible that the roads in the *cartier* needed thorough maintenance. After heavy rainfall, the edges of the quarter became nearly inaccessible. Parents had to carry the small children to reach the houses. Not surprisingly, the results from the survey on the quality of the roads are extremely low. A few women declared that they had individually visited the town hall to ask for stones to improve the road. They were answered that the mayor was not there to receive them. Otherwise, Roma did not take action to improve this situation. Roma did not want to start digging channels, because they did not think their neighbours would do the same. In an interview with the mayor, he frequently emphasised that the *comuna* had no resources to do any maintenance work. He made clear that the priorities were elsewhere. For instance, some of the *sat* around the *comuna* were difficult to reach, as the bridges over streams were old and ramshackle. However, Hungarian respondents recalled how M. had made a deal with the director of a brickfield in the neighbourhood. In return for six truckloads with stones, the company was allowed to dig from the public reserves belonging to the *comuna*. So arranged, the *comuna* received stones to repair roads without losing money from the budget. These truckloads were delivered and dumped *only* in the Hungarian streets on the north side, where roads were by no means in need of reconstruction. Regarding the prioritising of needs, the mayor seemed to have overlooked a few.

As several families had electricity, Roma were more satisfied about this issue. Also those households that tapped illegally from relatives elsewhere in the quarter were relatively satisfied with the situation. They arranged payment with their relatives. Still, a large share of the Roma had no electricity or great difficulties to make use of the two available stakes. Of the respondents said 37.5% to be 'very unsatisfied'





and 46.9% to be 'unsatisfied'. Usually the people who tapped illegally gave a neutral answer, 12.5%, and the 3.1% that said to be 'a little satisfied' were all households with a legal connection. The previous mayor had made an effort to provide the quarter with electricity stakes, but the Roma did not complete this job, failing to decide collectively how to arrange it. The new mayor had promised to install electricity stakes at the time of elections, but until this moment did not meet up with his promises. In an interview, he said to have negotiations with a company. He hoped the stakes would be installed in March 2006. The Roma in the quarter laughed about this statement, saying they were promised electricity for ten years, but it would never happen. They would wait and see. Roma councillor I. also had his doubts about this seemingly positive action of the mayor. The issue of electricity in the Roma quarter was never discussed in the council meetings. Indeed, an examination of the minutes of the council meetings of the past three years proved that this issue was not discussed in this period. Apparently, the Roma councillor had not raised this issue.

### ***Information, consultation and involvement***

For ordinary issues, Roma turned to either their councillor in the quarter or to the officials in the town hall. Several times a week, Roma visited I. B. with all kind of forms that had to be filled in or requests to be submitted. Some brought small bags with instant coffee, but he also assisted those who did not. Unlike in Nemşa, the authorities did not organise plenary village meetings, *şedinţă*, to inform the people and discuss relevant issues. Usually, I. announced information to a few others, who had to spread the information around. Some thought this worked alright. It is important to note that many Roma did not know how to look for information themselves, which is probably due to their low level education. The previous section described that some families lacked documents, which are sometimes easy to obtain.

Many Roma thought they missed information, because they did not trust the local authorities. As the officials never came to the quarter, they would probably not bother to announce important information.

The measure that beneficiaries of the social allowance should follow vocational courses was a recent change, which was important to almost all Roma. They should be informed about this; else they would suffer the consequences. I. said to have announced this information to several Roma, who would pass on this information. I asked around in the streets and in the centre. Many Roma had heard about this measure, but just as many had not. None of the Roma had acted upon the announcement. In the period that the research was carried out, the first persons came to I. to say that they did not receive certain papers, because they did not attend courses. Answers about the way the authorities involve Roma in communal issues, reflected the distance between the local authorities and the Roma. Roma stated that nobody ever asked them what they wanted, what they considered important, or what they needed. Nearly everyone expressed the phrase "They just work for themselves". 46.9% said to be 'absolutely unsatisfied' and 37.5% said to be 'unsatisfied' with the way the authorities involve the Roma in policy processes. Only 3.1% answered to be 'neutral' and another 3.1% 'a little satisfied'. The share of respondents that did not know, 9.4%, had no idea whether the local authorities ever involved the Roma. They vested their hopes on the local councillor and his ability to put Roma issues on the agenda.

### **Linking people's expectations and government actions**

It will be clear by now what the Roma expected from their government: regular social assistance, improvement of the roads and instalment of electricity, and if possible, a social housing programme and employment opportunities. In the opinion of the mayor, the biggest problem of the Roma was the size of most households. Poverty was caused by the large number of children and persons living in one room, which was again caused by a lack of education. The mayor and vice-mayor were aware of the assistance the Roma wished from them. The standard argument, with which the mayor, vice-mayor and councillors replied, was that the *comuna* had no resources. In general, it is absolutely true that local governments in Romania have few resources. As there were no companies or factories in Ogra, the only revenues for the *comuna* were taxes from the villagers and the few shops and bars. According to the treasurer, the *comuna* depended largely on state subsidies. The argument of having no resources was a critical one, as it was difficult to find out what was the annual budget of the local government. The treasures and bookkeepers proved not very cooperative. If the local government wanted to do so-called 'projects' on top of the maintenance of roads, public buildings and the budget needed salaries for the staff and office costs, project proposals had to be submitted to the county council. One big project that was started in 2000 and was still in process was the construction of waterworks from Iernut to Ogra.

Ogra was not connected to waterworks with drinking water and all villagers used wells. The main pipes would be constructed with state money, after which households could install connecting pipes to their houses on their own expenses.

Another way to examine how local authorities dealt with Roma issues was to inquire how they prioritise the needs in the community. From reports and interviews, it became clear that the situation in the Roma quarter had the lowest priority, if any priority at all. I went through the agendas and minutes of all council meetings held from January 2003 to August 2005. In none of these meetings Roma issues appeared on the agenda. At least for the last three years, the council did not speak about their quarter. Focusing on Roma councillor I., it came out that he only once focused attention on an issue that involved Roma. He had requested a piece of grazing land near the quarter for animals belonging to the Roma. However, as we have seen in the previous section, the Roma hardly possessed animals that need grazing land, one of them being a relative to the Roma councillor.

The issue of social assistance appeared in January 2005, when the *comuna* received the sum of money from the Mureş county council, which was to be allocated for social assistance. As only Roma were beneficiaries, this indirectly was a Roma issue. In the council was mainly discussed that the social worker who dealt with these files should receive her salary.

Interviews with the mayor, vice-mayor and a Hungarian councillor reflected that the poverty situation of the Roma was not one of the *comuna's* priorities. Each of them was asked to list the most important needs of the *comuna* and the activities undertaken by the authorities. They all agreed that the roads in the whole *comuna* and the school buildings in the *sat* required thorough renovation. The roads from the *sat* to the *centru de comună* had suffered from the rain and one bridge required reconstruction. The mayor said he probably had ways to order stones for the roads. The kindergarten had to be renovated and the councillor expressed the wish to build class rooms for grades 9 and 10, as the school now offered education up to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Also, they wanted the waterworks to be finished. Finally, the mayor hoped that they could finance sewerage in the *comuna*. The officials gave preference to issues that concerned the relationship between the *centru the comuna* and the *sat*. Roma issues were not on the list. Apart from this list of priorities, it became clear that the mayor considered the poor conditions of the Roma not *his* problem. The vice-mayor shared this opinion. Roma caused their own conditions, so they should solve it on their own. As the vice-mayor said:

They have many problems; with their houses, their hygiene. They are poor, they have no money. *Asta e viața*; that is life. There are a few who work. Many are not disciplined and don't work. They prefer to drink. We do try to educate them; we let the police speak with them. Maybe that will help, they will learn and have less problems.

On a few other occasions, the vice-mayor expressed that the Roma problem was part of life and that hardly anything could be done about it. This legitimized that he, as member of the local authorities, did not have to make any efforts. Any effort would be a waste of time and money. The mayor had the same opinion; the Roma themselves caused their poor conditions and therefore they should solve their own problems. Any move from the authorities would not help. In his words: "Țigani from Ogra do not really want to work. They are more lazy. Here the țigani are not really interested in a more civilised life with work. You can offer, but they won't take it up."

Several times, Roma raised the issue that the local councillor represented their interests in the local council. Other councillors did expect him to put Roma issues on the agenda. Councillor H. compared Roma councillor I.'s position with the positions of councillors from the *sat*, the small villages around Ogra village that belonged to the *comuna*:

The țigani are I.'s responsibility. Ogra has several *sat* and from several *sat* we have a councillor in the council. They raise issues about their *sat*, which the people from the *sat* asked them or told them to do. One councillor is asking for the renovation of the roads and the bridges that connect the *sat* to Ogra. This is what I. should do for the țigani.



Also the mayor and vice-mayor had this expectation. The Roma councillor to the Prefect in Târgu Mureş, Mr. N, acknowledged that it hard for a single Roma councillor to put Roma issues on the agenda. Other councillors would react reluctantly. I. had contacted Mr. N. in the past, to inquire about resources. In N's opinion, I. was not persuasive enough to make his point in the local council. A Roma councillor should try to raise issues time and again. Unlike I., who in the past three years did not raise any issue that concerned all Roma in the village.

Thus, from the council minutes and interviews with officials it became clear that the Roma conditions had no priority. Even when we take in consideration that *comuna* Ogra has few resources, it turned out that the poor conditions in the Roma quarter were never a topic for discussion. After all, mayor M. organised material to repair the roads in the centre without financial resources, while the roads in the *cartier* were in much worse conditions. Lack of involvement in Roma issues was partly due to the quite passive attitude of the Roma councillor. On the other hand, other officials made clear that any effort to improve the situation would be a waste of time and resources, as the Roma themselves are to blame for their poor conditions. As long as they did not improve their own situation, the authorities felt it was completely legitimate not to take action.

## Conclusion

The situation in the Roma quarter is characterised by a low level of social cohesion and distrust. Relations of reciprocity hardly existed; the expression "Everyone works up to his own fence" seemed to be the rule. Even among relatives it was uncommon to assist each other with labour activities. Several factors played a role in this situation. First, the quarter had rapidly expanded in a relatively short period time. As a consequence, many Roma did not know each other well and the 'community' hardly had any shared history. Second, resources to live from were scarce and families sometimes had competition over labour. In addition, one came to envy the extra assets other families gained. This led to a situation in which Roma did not trust their neighbours, which made cooperation almost impossible. Arguments and conflicts frequently occurred and the whole situation was made worse by the alcohol consumption. This lack of trust and prevailing competition hindered cooperation to that extent, that even in a situation that the previous mayor offered something that could improve their conditions, the example of the electricity stakes, the Roma failed to cooperate.

Although Roma participation in the CBO *Interetnica* was largely determined by the role of the Hungarian chair Mr. Sz., it did tell us a few other things. Roma *did* involve in the school project. They were even enthusiastic about it, as their children go there as well. None of the Roma would deny that music and dance are important activities in their daily lives. However, they had very different priorities when it came to spend their time effectively. The fact that Roma participants chose to work instead of attending rehearsals, clearly demonstrated that the CBO need to organise different activities if it wanted to involve Roma.

The relationship with the authorities was one of mutual distrust and lack of understanding. Roma expected their authorities to provide public services such as social assistance and infra-structural works, but also an interested attitude in their situation and openness in communication. They merely feel ignored. They also expected assistance from the authorities in issues that border personal responsibilities, like the digging of channels in the new streets of the quarter. While the authorities should provide the quarter with stones, the Roma themselves could start draining rainwater. The authorities see Roma issues as problems they should resolve on their own. They were convinced that the Roma caused their own conditions and as long as Roma did not change, the authorities would not make any efforts either. Even when we took in consideration that the *comuna* has few resources, it is clear that the local authorities did not give priority to the living conditions of the Roma.

The lack of ability to act collectively also hampered the Roma to take collective action regarding the government. On the other hand, the local authorities offered no institutional possibilities to interact such as village meetings. The only institution the Roma had to represent their interests was their councillor, I. As an official representative of the people, the Roma thus had 'their' person in the local council. It was clear that the actual situation is different; the Roma councillor did not actively pursue interests of all Roma. Both the councillor himself and the Roma felt he acted legitimately when he assisted those Roma that had cast their votes for him. Although the writing of requests and sending information to the Labour Office were no formal responsibilities, he used these tasks to favour his supporters.

## Conclusions

■ This paper discusses two different cases, two completely different Roma communities. The different situations in Nemşa and Ogra demonstrated how different social and political processes within these villages, different historical developments, and the different positions that Roma take in the villages result in different patterns of interaction in day-to-day contact, but especially around matters that were identified as critical issues. Now I overview the most important findings, thus building the models of interaction, and relating the results to the theories and concepts that were elaborated in section 2.

The communist period and the historical developments following the change of regime had consequences for the position of the Roma in the villages. Communism offered security in terms of work and basic services in both villages. Even though hardly any other goods were available, for the Roma it was a period of secure living. Certain differences did exist, however, concerning the meaning of labour and the involvement of Roma in especially the collectives. In Nemşa, Roma spoke with a certain pride of their village and the labour mentality of the people. Agriculture around the *sat* was flourishing and Roma emphasised how hard they worked together; they have always been *harnici* (hard-working) and they still are. Notwithstanding the enforced labour obligation, they were proud of their contribution to the flourishing of the *sat*. In Ogra, the Roma did not engage as actively in the work on the collectives as in Nemşa. They were paid for the number of hours they worked, they worked for what they needed and did not feel as if they were doing something for the village. In Ogra, people were working *for the communists*, while in Nemşa the people worked *for the sat*.

After the change of regime, the process and outcomes of re-distribution of collective land had lasting effects on the living conditions of the Roma. Roma in Nemşa had participated in the re-distribution commission in the *sat*. They were able to claim parts of the land reserves, which were expanded due to the leaving of the Saxons. Although the leaving of the Saxons was an external factor that created opportunities, it was telling that the Roma actually used this opportunity. On the contrary, Roma in Ogra lost everything, including their private gardens. Here, the re-distribution commission was dominated by high-placed officers. Neither the Roma nor other villagers were able to counterweight this process. Those few families that received land for their years of labour on the collectives, as was arranged by law, sold this land immediately. Direct needs for income and lack of knowledge on how to cultivate made them sell a valuable source of income. As a result, Roma in Nemşa now have an important asset to provide a living, whereas Roma in Ogra largely depend on irregular seasonal work and child allocation.

General economic conditions of the villages were difficult to compare. We can draw a few conclusions regarding the local budget of the authorities and employment opportunities. It was hard to find out the local budgets of the local authorities and information gathered was insufficient to make precise statements about how 'wealthy' the *comuna's* were. Both *comuna's* had limited revenues from enterprises and taxes, and depended on state subsidies. It was clear that the authorities in Nemşa actively sought for external funding in foreign donations and project funding at the level of the regional authorities in Sibiu. In Ogra, all subsidies were spent on office costs, salaries for officials and schoolteachers, and public streetlights. The authorities in Ogra thus had little space to carry out other activities. Furthermore, the *comuna's* offered hardly any employment opportunities. One could only find employment in agriculture within the *comuna's*. Villagers therefore needed to seek employment in neighbouring cities or had to live from their own produce only. From the perspective of the Roma, Nemşa's isolated location was a hindrance to find employment in Mediaş. Even though all Roma finished 8 or 10 grades, they had not enough resources to pay for transport. Roma in Ogra were in the first place unable to seek employment for their lack of educational attainment and human capital. Also in their case it was too expensive to go to Târgu Mureş to look for opportunities.

In Nemşa, the positive outcome of the re-distribution process indirectly affected the Roma's position in the village. Although the difference in wealth between Roma and Romanians was quite large, Roma had certain basic conditions and their agricultural activities were clearly visible. This created a positive image and contributed to a respected position in the village and they had quite good relations with their Romanian neighbours. The Romanian discourse on Roma was one that positioned the Roma as different, but respected. A strong adherence to the qualities *harnici* and *gospodar* was observed, which were qualities that were ascribed to 'good Romanians'. Between Roma and Romanians a mutual understanding does exist, which is reflected in the participation in each others' festivities. Otherwise, Roma and Romanians maintained quite pragmatic relationships, as Roma did paid work for Romanians.



In Ogra, ethnicity and poverty were strongly interwoven. The Roma quarter was clearly in poor condition and the physical barrier of the main road stressed the distance between the Roma and the majority population. The majority discourse concentrated on the relation between being Roma and living in poverty, resulting in the idea that Roma cause their own poor situation. Several villagers called Roma lazy, even though the number of Roma working as daily labourers is actually quite high. Disputes among Roma, clearly visible in the streets, their alcohol consumption, and occasional burglaries all contributed to a climate in which the majority would not be willing to change their opinions.

Living conditions did play a role in the shaping of social relations. Roma assisted each other in labour activity, all related to constructing houses and agriculture. Assets and living conditions of Roma in Nemşa were conducive to cooperation. Also, the higher level of education contributed to Roma's capacity to administer more institutionalised forms of cooperation. In Ogra, scarcity of resources forced Roma to work for their own interests and this made them envious of others. They were afraid that cooperation would lead to larger gains for others than for themselves, which reflected that Roma did not trust each other's good intentions. Here we see an illustration of Tilly's argument, namely that trust is related to risk. Roma in Ogra did not want to risk a loss of gains in cooperative processes. One woman said that poverty itself inhibited cooperation: "We cannot share if we don't have. We cannot work together if we don't have something to work on. We cannot give food to others if we cannot feed our own families!" (Roma woman, 31)

This comparison illustrates how economic conditions are linked to social relations. The situations in Nemşa and Ogra support Schuurman's argument that economic conditions explain social capital, making social capital the dependent variable.

### **Social networks, institutions, and organising practices**

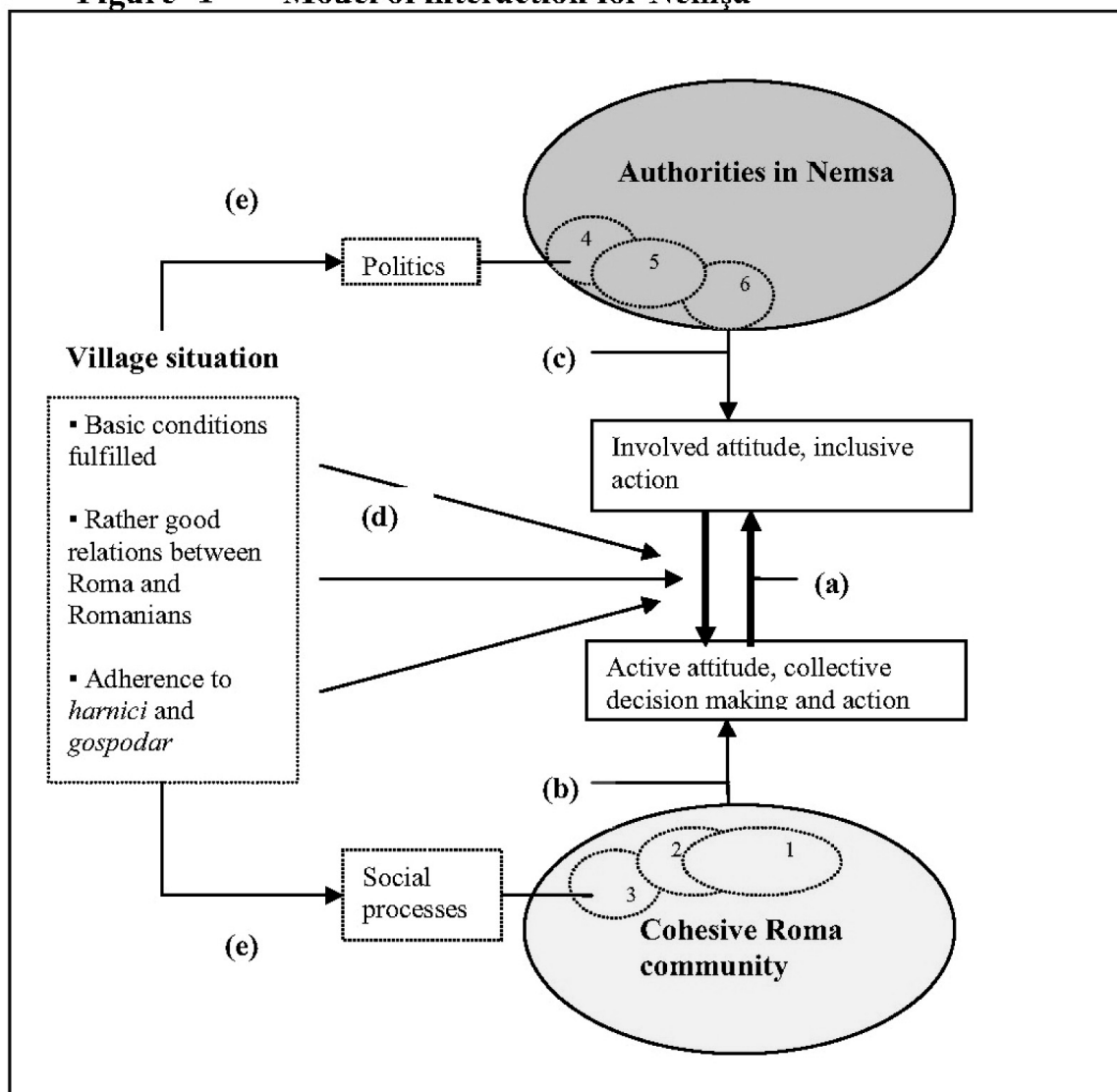
After an examination of the historical and socio-economic context, and the living conditions of the Roma, this study concentrated on the community structure and on social relations. Thus, the open spaces inside the entities of the model, which were referred to as 'social processes', were filled in. Confirmation of the Roma (*țigan*) identity and the level of trust and cooperation were taken as indicators of bonding social capital. Roma in Nemşa demonstrated a certain unity and pride over their Roma identity, linking their 'Roma-ness' directly to the qualities *harnici și gospodari* (hard-working and good in managing the household). They often stressed their unity by distinguishing themselves from Roma in 'other places', who were *leneși* (lazy) and not trustworthy.

Bonding social capital was also studied by focusing on networks of cooperation. Among Roma in Nemşa a high level of informal, reciprocal networks of cooperation exists. Most of these are day-to-day practices that help people to sustain their livelihoods. Informal cooperation concentrates on agricultural activities and the construction of houses and barns, but also on festivities. Roma are very much aware of the value of this reciprocity and anyone would live up to the expectation that this help is given in return. Importantly, Saxons brought along various forms of collective organisation that were taken over and continued over time, even when the Saxons themselves had left. This obviously had a profound impact on the development of social relations and practices in the village. The *Vecinătate* is an example of a highly institutionalised form of cooperation, which was originally a Saxon habit. It has rules of leadership and decision making. The rotating system of leadership, the collective process of deciding how to spend the rest of the resources all contributed to quite an egalitarian sphere among the Roma. Figure 1 presents the model of interaction for Nemşa.

Due to their level of education, they had enough human capital to secure effective participation in the CBO *Fraternitate*. Several individuals in the *sat* could do administrative tasks such as keeping lists of payments for collective expenses. Members of the executive committee said they collaborated well with Romanians and that they were able to set priorities together. Roma showed diligence in completing the project in the school and in taking up the Heifer goat project. The implementation of the project was largely in their hands. Especially the goat project brought several households personal gain, but everyone felt the project would do good for the whole *sat*.

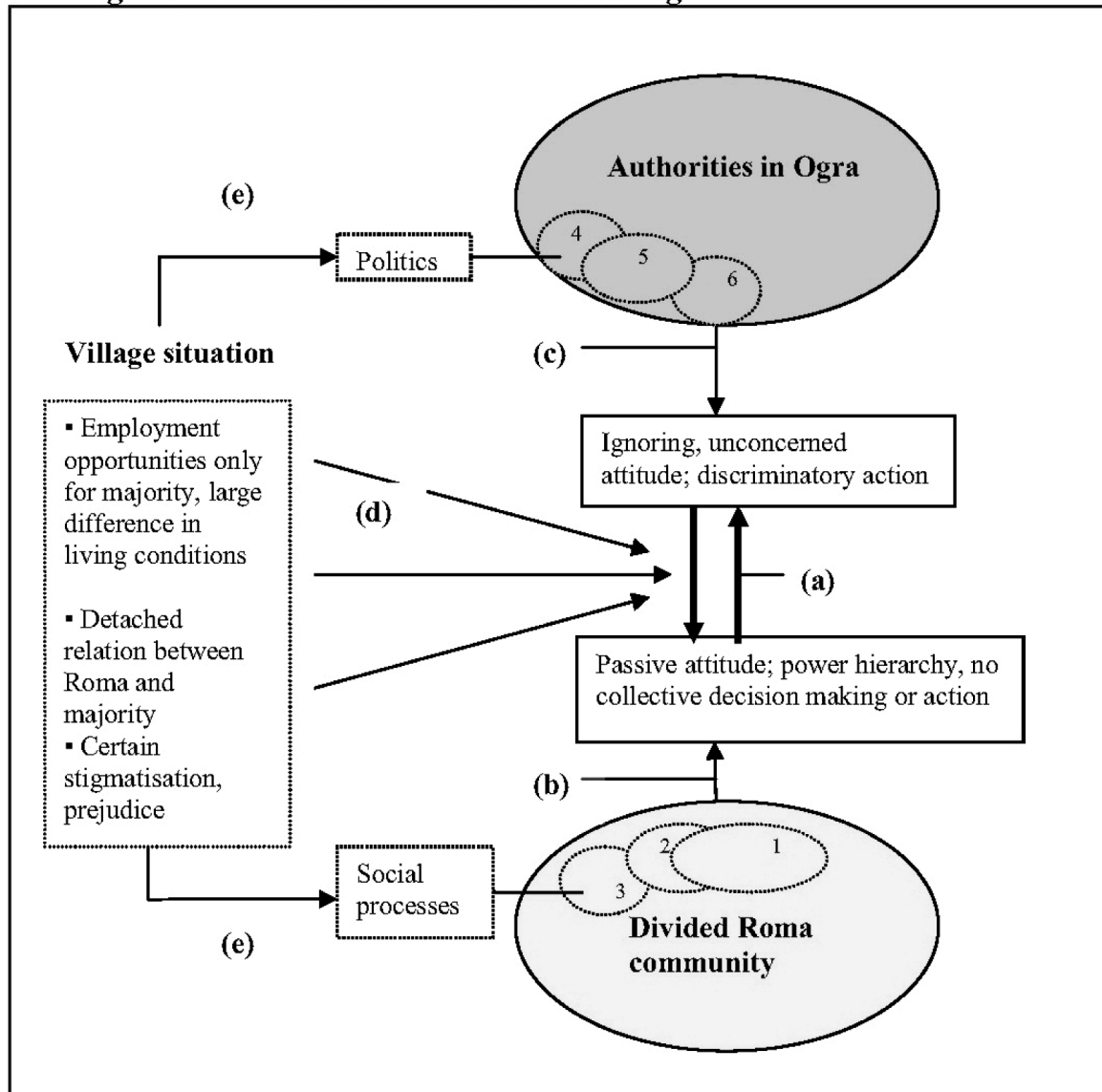
The situation in Nemşa was in sharp contrast with the Roma *cartier* in Ogra, where the Roma were far from a cohesive minority. They did refer to themselves as Roma and upheld an ethnic identity, but this shared identity absolutely did not imply ethnic solidarity. The Roma quarter was characterised by a low level of cohesion, lack of trust among its members, and few networks of cooperation and reciprocity. Cooperation was even rare among relatives. Moreover, the frequency with which arguments occurred out on the streets was illustrating the low level of cohesion in the *cartier*. Figure 2 depicts the situation in Ogra.

**Figure 1 Model of interaction for Nemşa**



- 1 = rather equal community structure
- 2 = considerable level of trust, reciprocity, and solidarity
- 3 = cooperation: informal Vecinătate, formal CBO Fraternitate
- 4 = looking for external funding
- 5 = inclusive ideology
- 6 = correct application of rules

**Figure 2 Model of interaction for Ogra**



- 1 = unequal community structure
- 2 = low level of trust, reciprocity, and solidarity
- 3 = lack of participation in CBO Fraternitate
- 4 = ignoring Roma issues in priority setting
- 5 = exclusive ideology
- 6 = abusive application of rules

We can point out the major causes for this difference in cohesion of the Roma communities. First of all the composition of the Roma community and its development over the years. The Roma quarter in Ogra expanded rapidly during the nineteen nineties, because so many Roma families came to settle there. Although the village offered few labour opportunities, it was apparently quite easy to settle illegally in the quarter until the end of the nineteen nineties, when the police started checking for illegal residence. Older Roma inhabitants of the quarter did not speak positively of the newcomers, accusing them of alcohol abuse and causing trouble. In contrast, Nemşa's geographically isolated position made it unattractive for people moving in. A few rich Romanian families came from the city and settled in the



largest Saxon houses, but they refrained from social activities in the village. The majority of the villagers thus originated from Nemşa and knows each other very well.

Secondly, the poor conditions of the Roma in Ogra have a strong influence on social relations. Their poverty and the scarcity of jobs resulted in a competitive sphere in the quarter. Households do not wish better conditions for others, if they do not gain from it themselves. This attitude became more serious with the arrival of 'new Roma', whose arrival put an even larger strain on the job market. Roma are afraid cooperation will lead to personal loss while the other gains and therefore refrained from any form of reciprocity and cooperation.

It was thus not surprising that Roma could not fully engage in the activities run by *Interetnica*, Ogra's CBO. First of all, they were not capable of discussing with Romanian and Hungarian committee members on an equal footing. They had never engaged in these activities before and they lacked experience and knowledge. This was further complicated by the dominant attitude of the Hungarian chair of the committee, Mr. Sz. Furthermore, the type of activities did not serve the interests of the Roma. Former Roma committee members made clear that they would like to see *Interetnica* undertaking activities to improve their living conditions. Instead of introducing ideas in the committee, they withdrew from the association.

Historically, differences in organising capacity were already obvious after the fall of the communist regime, when the commissions of land re-distribution were erected. Whereas in Nemşa the Roma formed part of this commission, Roma in Ogra did not organise to gain from re-distribution. Although re-distribution happened in the early nineteen nineties and a reconstruction of the events had to be based on stories, it seemed that Nemşa's Roma were already better organised, while at the same time being more respected and listened to than the Roma in Ogra.

A crucial difference between the villages was the difference in Roma community structures. In Nemşa, none of the households or families was considerably wealthier than others, or particularly influential. They did differentiate households on basis of assets, usually they call a household poorer if it had more than three children and little space, but these households participated in communal activities as any other. Apart from a rather equal situation in terms of assets, the Roma community in Nemşa was remarkably equal in terms of power. None of the households held power over others or could decide over community issues. The Roma themselves spoke of individual Roma who were much respected, but they were not seen as 'leaders'. In contrast, the Roma community in Ogra was characterised by substantial differences in assets and capacities between the households. Families that were extremely poor, having five to seven children and no income, lived next door to families that were a bit better off. Moreover, a certain hierarchy existed due to the position of the Roma councillor. He used his formal institutional power subjectively, creating differences between families. He seriously disadvantaged households that lived in poverty. We need to see his actions in the light of the social situation in the *cartier*. On the one hand, he is a councillor with institutional powers. On the other hand, he is a member of a community where people did not wish others to become successful.

Concluding we can say that social processes in the Roma communities are completely different from each other. Although the community structure is partly influenced by differences in assets, differences in power clearly matter. These factors explain why Roma in Nemşa were able to act collectively and knew many forms of organisation, whereas the Roma community in Ogra can be characterised as rather passive. Their failure to cooperate and act collectively was illustrated in the case of the electricity stakes that were offered and the channel in the new street that was not made. This situation was again reflected in the different ways Roma participate in the village CBOs. While in Nemşa the Roma were actively participating and running the activities, the CBO in Ogra was dominated by a Hungarian man and the Roma withdrew instead of organising to pursue their interests. The next section demonstrates how a similar explanation can be given for the way they interact with the local authorities. Roma in Ogra expect lots of assistance from the authorities, while at the same time they lack the capacity to act in their own interests and 'their' intermediary fails to represent them. This passive attitude is brought forth by their poverty and their lack of trust and will to cooperate. Also, they see themselves as 'inferior citizens', resulting in the idea that whatever they will do, they will not succeed in getting a better life.

### Reflections on Theory

Findings of this study raise several questions regarding the use of the concept *social capital*, and its analytical uploads *bonding* and *bridging social capital*. First of all, social capital is often conceptualised as forms of associational activity, or organisational forms of cooperation, and thus measured by the density of associations. This will not present an accurate picture of reality though. Let us start with *bridging social capital*. Strictly taken, CBOs exist in both villages, each with an interethnic list of members. However,





members from different ethnic groups formally participate, but the Roma in Ogra effectively do not participate. Ogra's CBO *Interetnica* is meant to bring ethnic groups together, but in reality so many misunderstandings existed that the Roma gradually turned their backs. Thus, although the villages both 'score' on bridging social capital, one has to look into the associations and into other, unorganised, forms of relationships between Roma and the majority to understand the position of Roma in the village. Regarding *bonding social capital*, it would not be enough to rest with the assumption that Roma in both villages acknowledge their Roma identity and refer to themselves as *țigani*. Again, one has to look deeper into the community structure to see what is really happening. Roma in Nemșa form a cohesive group, while the Roma community in Ogra is marked by social tensions and power differences. In Nemșa, the institutionalised form of cooperation in the *Vecinătate* would in this case be an indicator of bonding social capital. Yet, one needs to know additional characteristics such as the rotation of leadership to know that this is a horizontally organised institution. These findings show a need to focus on *processes* inside the communities and community associations, directing attention to the factor power. Social capital as it is used presents a static view of reality, ignoring social and political processes, and (political) power in particular. In my opinion, one can rather speak of networks, differentiating between functions, objectives and effects, and relations of power. Ashutosh Varshney rather speaks of networks instead of social capital. His research demonstrates the value of bridging social networks. Interethnic associations between Muslims and Hindus served to organise interethnic dialogue on different levels, which prevented riots. Remarkably, in his conclusions he does not mention the linkages that were established between local authorities and these associations. Section 8.4.3 discusses more deeply this linkage between the social and the political. From the situations in Ogra and Nemșa, we may conclude that day-to-day contacts between Roma and Romanians and Hungarians do matter. Roma in Nemșa are respected by their Romanian neighbours, which positively affects their position in the *comuna* and their relation with the authorities. In Ogra, Roma live both physically and socially segregated from the majority. Contact between the groups occurs rarely and is restricted to negotiation over labour, political capital.

This study examined local situations in villages where few bodies of organised actors exist. Looking at the relationship between the Roma and the local authorities, we see that several issues are politicised and discussed in the public sphere. This is certainly the case in Nemșa, whereas Roma in Ogra do not have the capacities to take such issues to a public level. Also, Roma in Nemșa sometimes collaborated with the authorities, using formal institutions to organise these activities. The question is thus whether these activities and this discussion can be reckoned to be civil society activities. In my opinion, they do belong to the civil society sphere.

Charles Tilly put the emphasis not on associations *per se*, but on the extent to which trust networks integrate in public politics. This implies that trust networks can prevail outside associations. Integration occurs if citizens trust their authorities and is indicated by a readiness to a) make use of public services, b) transfer certain responsibilities to the state, and c) take a servile attitude toward the state (Tilly 2005: 35). The survey showed a huge difference in political trust between the villages; Roma in Nemșa have more trust in their authorities than Roma in Ogra have in theirs. Indeed, Nemșa scores positively on these indicators. Also, following Levi's model of contingent consent (cited in Tilly 2005: 19), all Roma in Nemșa equally engage in community issues, on several occasions they receive information on government actions, and the authorities meet their expectations. In Nemșa, we see how the authorities are open to a broad and equal participation in politics. We see that Roma in Nemșa and their authorities complement each other's activities in maintaining the village; an integration of trust networks. Roma do express criticism on the functioning of the authorities, but they succeed in bringing this criticism into the public sphere. In Ogra, networks among Roma barely exist, nor do they trust their authorities. The police raids in the past, the absence of interest and the breaking of promises they perceived on the side of the authorities mainly cause lack of political trust. Also, the closed attitude of the local authorities forms a barrier to participation in politics. On top of a quite low level of organising capacity on the part of the Roma, this closed attitude discourages Roma to take any actions at all.

Roma in Nemșa have the capacities to engage effectively in the public sphere. One day, an older Roma man was sitting on a bench in front of his house, watching his grandchild playing in Strada Brazilor. "Țigan, that is what I am", he said, "I have a voice, so I can speak. But I have to raise my voice if I want someone to hear me." After the fall of the communist regime, democracy formally gave a voice to the Roma minority in Romania. This study demonstrates that one first of all needs the capacity to organise and to raise this voice. At the same time, both Roma and the authorities need to create and maintain a space in which this voice can be exercised.

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## Abstract

■ This Working Paper is summarizing the main empirical findings presented in the Author's MA thesis. She defended her thesis at the Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen (CIDIN), Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands, in June 2006.

This study examines local situations in villages where few bodies of organised actors exist. Looking at the relationship between the Roma and the local authorities, we see that several issues are politicised and discussed in the public sphere.

The objectives of this research can be formulated as follows: with this study it aims to make a contribution to the knowledge about social exclusion of the Roma – by describing social processes and explaining how social and political processes shape the relationship between the Roma and local authorities – and to make a contribution to the knowledge on the interaction between formal and informal institutions.



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Analysis of the role of ethnicity in the social stratification dynamics in Romania;  
The institutional cultural heritage of minorities in Romania;  
Ethnic segregation patterns;  
Bilingualism: ways of generating bilingualism, public attitudes and policies;  
Recent immigrants to Romania: patterns of social and economic integration.

A kolozsvári székhelyű, jogi személyként működő NEMZETI KISEBBSÉGGUTATÓ INTÉZET (NKI) a Román Kormány hatáskörébe tartozó közintézmény.

### ■ Célok

A romániai nemzeti kisebbségek és más etnikai közösségek etnikai identitásmegőrzésének, -változásainak, -kifejeződésének, valamint ezek szociológiai, történelmi, kulturális, nyelvészeti, vallásos és más jellegű aspektusainak kutatása, tanulmányozása.

### ■ Főbb kutatási irányvonalak

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A romániai kisebbségek népességdemográfiai jellemzői;

Átmeneti identitások – etnikai revitalizálás vagy asszimiláció? (a romániai kisebbségek identitásában végbemenő változások elemzése);

Az etnicitás szerepe a társadalmi rétegződésben;

A romániai nemzeti kisebbségek kulturális öröksége;

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A kétnyelvűség módozatai, az ehhez kapcsolódó attitűdök és közpolitikák;

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